

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上の ホライゾンⅠ

下



GENESIS Series
Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I (B)

The “academies” of the different nations have taken action concerning the fate of the world.
The enemies are the major world powers and the Eight Great Dragon Kings.
Also, an internal dispute begins within Musashi.
But as various people carry different expectations and resolve, an idiot is always with them.
“I will take back everything you lost because of me!”
As the time limit for her “suicide” draws ever closer, can Toori really save Horizon?
And where does Musashi’s destiny lie?
The first story of the GENESIS series “Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon” is completed.



か-5-31
川上 稔
イラスト: さとやす
GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンI
川上 稔

電撃文庫
890

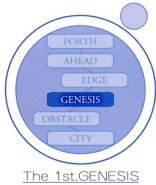


ISBN978-4-04-867270-2
C0193 ¥890E



Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended retail price: **890 JPY**
*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately



Kawakami Minoru
Born January 3, 1975 and from Tokyo. In addit to novels and illustrations, he has started wor with videos and music to make flash movies. I also has a ton to read and thoroughly plays vi games, so it is a mystery when he ever has a chance to sleep.
[Dengeki Bunko Novels]
City Series
Panzerpolis 1935
Aerial City
Tune Bust City Hong Kong <A>
Noise City Osaka <A>
Closed City Paris <A>
Panzerpolis Berlin 1-5
Virtual City DT <A>
AHEAD Series
Owari no Chronicle 1~7
GENESIS Series
Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I <A><
[Dengeki Novels]
Renshaou <A>

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Born in Yamagata and raised in Tochigi. “Rice crackers really can’t be sweet. Sweet ones jus aren’t right.” Monsieur Sommelier prefers a dr taste.

Installation

- Masazumi Honda

installation



installation

Historically, he and his father were quite resourceful.

His father even rose against Ieyasu, so he was an incredible person.

■Honda Masazumi■

Historically, he and his father were quite resourceful. His father even rose against Ieyasu, so he was an incredible person.

The historical Masazumi was equally as skilled and he did not hold back in battles to overthrow his political opponents.

But even if the father in this world is like his historical counterpart, Masazumi herself is a bit more awkward.

In terms of design, Masazumi's rather masculine, though there's still something feminine about her...

As such I designed her around a boy's uniform.

The front of her Ariadust cardigan is kept closed to hide her chest, but it's also another manifestation of her serious attitude.

Though it's true that she wears a boy's uniform due to the circumstances surrounding her body, she also prefers it due to its durability, and because she doesn't need to clean it.

She's stingy like that.

She wears gloves so the movements of her hands and body during her speeches become more pronounced.

She wears them when she's moving around, but not during classes or when nothing's going on.

Her wardrobe isn't very large either, so the uniform doubles as her own clothing.

In these aspects, she isn't very girly, but she keeps a pocket binder at her waist, and she doesn't care if it looks like a skirt, so...

I guess she does feel like a girl.

The way she walks, her strength and endurance, the curve of her hips...

No matter how much she pretends, these all point to her being a woman.

I wonder, don't the boys around her all take special care of her, and aren't they faintly aware of her?

In the last novel, the bottom part of her uniform was also a boy's uniform, but due to certain developments she now wears an eclectic combination: a girl's bottoms (the black tights,) and a boy's top, shown on the cover page.

(Kawakami Minoru)

The historical Masazumi was equally as skilled and he did not hold back in battles to overthrow his political opponents.

But even if the father in this world is like his historical counterpart, Masazumi herself is a bit more awkward.

In terms of design, Masazumi's rather masculine though there's still something feminine about her...

As such I designed her around a boy's uniform.

The front of her Ariadust cardigan is kept closed to hide her chest, but it's also another manifestation of her serious attitude.

Though it's true that she wears a boy's uniform due to the circumstances surrounding her body, She also prefers it due to its durability, and because she doesn't need to clean it.

She's stingy like that.

She wears gloves so the movements of her hands and body during her speeches become more pronounced.

She wears them when she's moving around, but not during classes or when nothing's going on.

Her wardrobe isn't very large either, so the uniform doubles as her own clothing.

In these aspects, she isn't very girly; but she keeps a pocket binder at her waist, and she doesn't care if it looks like a skirt, so...

I guess she does feel like a girl.

The way she walks, her strength and endurance, the curve of her hips...

No matter how much she pretends, these all point to her being a woman.

I wonder, don't the boys around her all take special care of her, and aren't they faintly aware of her?

In the last novel, the bottom part of her uniform was also a boy's uniform; but due to certain developments she now wears an eclectic combination: a girl's

bottoms (the black tights,) and a boy's top, shown on the cover page.

(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 1B**



I'm heading to you right now, so ——

I
下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

I'm heading to you right now, so...

Characters

horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.01





2

character



Name: Honda Masazumi

Faction: Musashi Ariadust Academy

Position: Vice President

Style: Negotiator

Special: Solemnity



Name: Tachibana Muneshige

Faction: Alcalá de Henares

Position: 1st Special Duty

Style: Close-quarter-combat martial artist

Special: Godspeed

Name: Masazumi Honda

Affiliation: Musashi Ariadust Academy

Position: Vice-President

Class: Negotiator

Specialty: Solemnity

Name: Tachibana Muneshige

Affiliation: Alcalá de Henares

Position: 1st Special Duty Officer

Class: Close-quarter-combat martial artist

Specialty: Godspeed

World

4

world



Name: Heidi Augesvarer

The Hexagone Française controls a large amount of fertile land, but it is without emperor or pope. The Roman Empire's emperor is weak, his claim to the throne lost, and the lordlings squabble over territory, taking up time and attention. Italia is weak, it relies on the strength of its Pope and its economic prowess. The disharmony between these three Tsirhc nations lies in the roots of Europe.

Currently battling...

Year 800

•“The Early Days of Europe: How It Came to Be”•

After the Roman Empire, which had previously ruled Europe, crumbled, only the existence of the Tsirhc religion, which spanned nations and peoples, kept the continent, left without a ruler, from doing the same. Besides forming a covenant for it to be a point of common faith and purpose, reliance upon the principled Tsirhc religion was, for the broken and chaotic world, like giving life a direction: where righteousness meant living in frugality, and crime a taboo. Eventually, Charlemagne suppressed all of Europe, and was crowned by the Pope as the Roman Emperor. This would become the symbol of a union between the Tsirhc religion, common throughout all of Europe despite its lack of military might, and the representative of a kingdom, which did have a military. But after Charlemagne's death, the Empire split into three, which would afterward be known as the Hexagone Francaise, the Holy Roman Empire, and Italia.

Precepts of the religion

“The Three Nations Post-Schism”

Kingdom of Western France
(Afterward Hexagone Française)

Kingdom of Eastern France
(Afterward Holy Roman Empire)

Kingdom of Central France
(Afterward Italia)

Name: Erimaki

world

"The Early Days of Europe: How It Came to Be"

After the Roman Empire which had previously ruled Europe crumbled, only the existence of the Tsirhc religion which spanned nations and peoples kept the continent, left without a ruler, from doing the same. Besides forming a covenant for it to be a point of common faith and purpose, reliance upon the principled* Tsirhc religion was, for the broken and chaotic world, like giving life a direction: where righteousness meant living in frugality, and crime a taboo.

*Underlined, the precepts of the religion.

Eventually, Charlemagne suppressed all of Europe and was crowned by the Pope as the Roman Emperor. This would become the symbol of a union between the Tsirhc religion, common throughout all of Europe despite its lack of military might, and the representative of a kingdom which did have a military. But after Charlemagne's death the Empire split into three, which would afterward be known as the Hexagone Française, the Holy Roman Empire, and Italia.

"The Three Nations Post-Schism"

- Blue Square: Kingdom of Western France (Afterward Hexagone Française)
- Yellow Square: Kingdom of Eastern France (Afterward Holy Roman Empire)
- Green Square: Kingdom of Central France (Afterward Italia)

(Name: Erimaki)

The Hexagone Française controls a large amount of fertile land, but it is without emperor or pope. The Holy Roman Empire's emperor is weak, his claim to the throne lost, and the lordlings squabble over territory taking up time and attention. Italia* is weak; it relies on the strength of its Pope and its economic prowess.

*In red, currently battling.

The disharmony between these three Tsih nations lies in the roots of Europe.

(Name: Heidi Ogezavara)

"We're the Student Counciiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!"

"We're the Student Councilil!"



"Start of the Special General Student Meeting (Neshinbara)"



Distributors: Musashi Ariadust Student Council

Hello everyone, this is Neshinbara. Yes, the one who has a history of being told that it's difficult to tell which of my names is actually my first or last name.

Well then, it's time for this week's

"Musashi-san".

"Toori, I will become a dumpling."

"Shiro, are you alright with me kneeling?"

"Seijun, be my Dom."

The above three messages are this week's:
"Musashi-san".

Next, concerning the special general student meeting. It will take place on the bridge facing the Musashi Ariadust Academy. Seijun and the others are getting excited, so I guess it's fine if cold-blooded people like me are just standing off in the distance...

So Much Information!

- Greetings for me! (0)
- Causing trou... (128)
- Apologies (64)
- Investigating Records (32)
- False Charges (0)
- Appointments for Self-reflection (127)
- Work for the Student Council (78)
- Secret Correspondences (256)
- Game Reviews (512)

Archive

- "Start of the Special General Student Meeting" (Neshinbara)
- "'Nuruhachi!' Review" (Toori)
- "Recent Statistics Concerning Food Intake" (O...)
- "Get On Your Knees" (Shiro)
- "Don't Pitch Without a Break You Idiot" (Shiro)
- "'Your Imperial Majesty, Is This Alright?' Review" (Toori)
- "'Phoenix Wight: Witch Attorney' Review" (Toori)
- "'The Truth About the Roman Empire' Review" (Toori)
- "Next Up is England!" (Neshinbara)
- "Flowers on the Grand Path" (O...)

Useful Links

- I'm not scared of you, Chancellor's Officers!
- Musashi Public Relations
- Marubeya is all smiles
- Circle GEKIBUN
- M.A.S. Literature
- Provisional Council MIKKOKU Inbox
- Musashi Chamber of Commerce 'Money! Money! Money!'
- Staff Group "Spartan"
- School-President Sakai "Don't go Overboard"
- Oriotorai "Update Pending"
- The Testament Union "The Me of Tomorrow"
- Oxford TRUMPS
- Mikawa "The Industrious Teacher" (link dead)

"Start of the Special Student Body Meeting (Neshinbara)"

Poster:

It's time to end this!

The special student body meeting is starting!

Distributors: Musashi Ariadust Student Council

Hello everyone, this is Neshinbara. Yes, the one who has a history of being told that it's difficult to tell which of my names is actually my first or last name. Well then, it's time for this week's "Musashi-san": **"Toori, I will become a dumpling."**

"Shiro, are you alright with me kneeling?"

"Seijun, be my Dom."

The above three messages are this week's: "Musashi-san".

Next, concerning the special student body meeting. It will take place on the bridge facing the Musashi Ariadust Academy. Seijun and the others are getting excited, so I guess it's fine if cold-blooded people like me are just standing off in the distance...

So Much Information!

- Greetings for me! (0)
- Causing trou... (128)
- Apologies (64)
- Investigating Records (32)
- False Charges (0)
- Appointments for Self-reflection (127)
- Work for the Student Council (78)
- Secret Correspondences (256)
- Game Reviews (512)

Archive

- "Start of the Special Student Body Meeting (Neshinbara)"
- " 'Nuruhachi!' Review (Toori)' "

- "Recent Statistics Concerning Food Intake (O...) "
- "Get On Your Knees (Shiro)' "
- "Don't Pitch Without a Break You Idiot (Shiro)"
- " 'Your Imperial Majesty, Is This Alright?' Review (Toori)"
- " 'Phoenix Wight: Witch Attorney' Review (Toori)"
- " 'The Truth About the Roman Empire' Review (Toori)"
- "Next Up is England! (Neshinbara)"
- "Flowers on the Grand Path (O...)"

Useful Links

- I'm not scared of you, Chancellor's Officers!
- Musashi Public Relations
- Marubeya is all smiles.
- Circle GEKIBUN
- M.A.S. Literature
- Provisional Council MIKKOKU Inbox
- Musashi Chamber of Commerce 'Money! Money! Money!'
- Staff Group "Spartan"
- School-President Sakai "Don't go Overboard"
- Oriotorai "Update Pending"
- The Testament Union "The Me of Tomorrow"
- Oxford TRUMPS
- Mikawa "The Industrious Teacher" (link dead)

Far East History

極東史

Far Eastern History

A R I A D U S T

First of all

People snap under stress.

Or so the people of the early-modern age would have us think.
Learn how much stress they can really take, and aid them.



I (B)

Table of Contents

Chapter 21 - Worrier in the Twilight P15	Table of Contents P9
Chapter 22 - Unconcerned Colleagues P25	Character Introduction P10
Chapter 23 - Skeptics in the Meeting Session P49	Glossary P12
Chapter 24 - The Determined on the Plains P77	Study ●Religion on Musashi● P48
Chapter 25 - Advocate at the Confession Grounds P99	Study ●The Musashi Ariadust Academy● P98
Chapter 26 - Refuter at the Execution Grounds P147	Study ●Musashi's Knights● P274
Chapter 27 - The Powerful Below Ground P183	
Chapter 28 - The Usurper in Town P207	
Chapter 29 - Musashi's Knights P239	
Chapter 30 - Me at the Last Moment P275	
Chapter 31 - As I Stand at the Last Moment P303	
Chapter 32 - Absolute Supporter P353	
Chapter 33 - The Summit's Flower P419	
Chapter 34 - Those Running Toward the Borderline P469	
Chapter 35 - The Trumpeter at the Start Line P513	
Chapter 36 - Communicator between Two People P529	
Chapter 37 - Those Travelling Through the Blue Sky P563	
Chapter 38 - Musashi's Mr. Impossible P601	
Chapter 39 - He who Gouges Holes in the Mainstream P623	
Chapter 40 - She who Seeks the Realm of Speed P647	
Chapter 41 - Those Facing Each Other from Parallel Lines P687	
Chapter 42 - Those Facing Each Other on the Borderline P719	
Chapter 43 - Continuous Adherent P737	
Last Chapter - Myself From Now On P755	

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Book Design Concept: TENKY

First of all

"People snap under stress."

Or so the people of the early-modern age would have us think.

Learn how much stress they can really take, and aid them.

Table of Contents 1-B

- Table of Contents (9)
- Character Introduction (10)
- Glossary (12)
- Chapter 21 - Worrier in the Twilight (15)
- Chapter 22 - Unconcerned Colleagues (25)
- Study - The Testament in Musashi (48)
- Chapter 23 - The Skeptics at the Meeting (49)
- Chapter 24 - The Resolved on the Fields (77)
- Study – Musashi Ariadust Academy (98)
- Chapter 25 - Spokesman at the Confession Grounds (99)
- Chapter 26 - Denier at the Execution Grounds (147)
- Chapter 27 - The Mighty Underneath (183)
- Chapter 28 - The Usurper In Town (207)
- Chapter 29 - Musashi's Knights (239)
- Study - Musashi's Knights (274)
- Chapter 30 - (pending) /(275)
- Chapter 31 - (pending) (303)
- Chapter 32 - The Supporters Everywhere (353)
- Chapter 33 - The Summit's Flower (419)
- Chapter 34 - They Run to the Horizon (469)
- Chapter 35 - Trumpeters at the Start-line (513)
- Chapter 36 - Mediator Between the Two (529)
- Chapter 37 - Wanderers of the Azure Sky (563)
- Chapter 38 - Musashi's Mr. Impossible (601)
- Chapter 39 - Piercers of the Mainstream (623)
- Chapter 40 - Seekers of the Path (647)
- Chapter 41 - Opposites on Parallel Lines (687)
- Chapter 42 - Opposites on the Horizon (719)

- Chapter 43 - Travellers of the Unending Path (737)
- Final Chapter - Myself in the Future (755)

Characters

**Aoi Kimi**

Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tensioned and selfish in practice.

**Aoi Toori**

Main character. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr.

**Asama Tomo**

Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.

**Azuma**

Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.

Adele Balfette

From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.

Itou Kenji

Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.

Ohiroshiki Ginji

Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.

**Kiyonari Urquiaga**

2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.

**Shirojiro Bertoni**

Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.

**Tenzou Crossunite**

1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.

**Toussaint Neshinbara**

Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.

Naomasa

6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.

**Nate Mitotsudaira**

5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.

Nenji

Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.

**Noriki**

Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.

**Heidi Augesvarer**

Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.

Hassan Furubushi

Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.

**Persona-kun**

Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.

Honda Masazumi

Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.

**Malga Naruze**

4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.

**Margot Naito**

3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.

Miriam Poqou

Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.

**Mukai Suzu**

Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.

character

character

Academy Affiliates



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Sanyou Mitsuki

Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.



Horizon Ariadust

Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismo Oplo.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.

Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.



Honda Futayo

Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.

Other

Innocentius

Pope-Chancellor. Leader of the Catholics and representative of K.P.A. Italia.

Oda Nobunaga

A name-inheritor appeared recently, but that inheritor has not appeared out of fear of Testament Union assassins.

Matsudaira Motonobu

Mikawa's ruler. He is a "Puppet Man", but keeps his neutral state between the Testament Union and P.A.O.D.A.



Tachibana Muneshige

Peerless in the West. Logismo Oplo "Lype Katathlipse" user. Tres España's 1st special duty officer. A fairly nice person and adopted into his family by marriage.

Tachibana Gin

Tachibana Dousetsu's daughter, Muneshige's wife and false arms girl. Tres España's 3rd special duty officer. Has a rather calm personality.

- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo-style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.

- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.

● Academy's Affiliates

- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- Honda Futayo: Student of Mikawa. Daughter of Honda Tadakatsu. Her language is rough, preferring to use a samurai's personal pronoun and definite article.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismo Oplo.

● Others

- Oda Nobunaga: In recent years, an inheritor of the name appeared, but wary of the Testament Union's assassination, he does not show his figure in public.
- Innocentius: Pope-Chancellor. The head of the old faith and representative of K.P.A. Italia.
- Matsudaira Motonobu: Mikawa's ruler. He is a "Puppet Man", but he keeps his neutral state between the Testament Union and P.A. Oda.

- Tachibana Muneshige: Peerless in the West. Wielder of the Deadly Sin Armament 'Sloth's Lament'. First special duty officer of Tres España. A good, kind man and son-in-law.
- Tachibana Gin: Tachibana Dousetsu's daughter and Muneshige's wife. Both her arms are prosthetic. Tres España's third special duty officer. Has a rather calm personality.

Glossary

F

Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
Fino Alba (Star of Mechanical Devices): K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
Holy Spells: Tsrhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
Internal Blessings: Blessings stored within oneself.
IZUMO (Izumo Industries): The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

Jud./Judgement: Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

K.P.A. Italia: K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

A

Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

Catholic (Old Faith): The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

Edel Brocken (Overlooking Magic Mountain): Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
Ether: Component that makes up contradiction allowing space.
Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

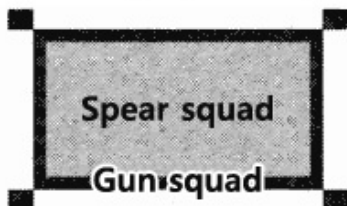
words

S

- San Mercado (Pure Metropolis):** Tres Español brand.
- Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Song of Passage:** Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution Offering:** Something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus:** Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

- Tercio:** The popular formation in this era. Formed by around a thousand people, the infantry are packed closely together, pikemen surrounded by riflemen. Excels in defensive capability, but slow. It's common to use it in groups of 3 squads or more.



- Tes./Testament:** Means "understood".
- Testament:** A history book that provides the history of the earth's previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions:** History of the earth's previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union:** An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma:** Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España:** Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

L

- Ley Line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismoi Oplo (Deadly Sins' Weapons):** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empire.
- Mikawa:** Located between India and the Middle East. Because it had been named as the controller of the Far East, it acts as a residential area for the Far East, and the Testament Union has acknowledged its high autocracy, but because of the Testament's description, it allied with P.A.ODA. As P.A.ODA had half-ceded from the Testament Union, it became a neutral country in a half locked-country status to both the Testament Union and P.A.ODA.
- Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.
- Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A.ODA:** Oda clan + Osman (Ottoman).
- Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant (New Faith):** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing:** China.

R

- Religion:** Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic (Old Faith): The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- Edel Brocken (Overlooking Magic Mountain): Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba (Star of Mechanical Devices): K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO (Izumo Industries): The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismoí Óplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empire.
- Mikawa: Located between India and the Middle East. Because it had been named as the controller of the Far East, it acts as a residential area for the Far East, and the Testament Union has acknowledged its high autocracy, but because of the Testament's description, it allied with P.A.ODA. As P.A.ODA had half-ceded from the Testament Union, it became a neutral country in a half locked-country status to both the Testament Union and P.A.ODA.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.
- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. ODA: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant (New Faith): A new style of Tsrhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing: China.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- San Mercado (Pure Metropolis): Tres Españan brand.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

- Tercio: The popular formation in this era. Formed by around a thousand people, the infantry are packed closely together, pikemen surrounded by riflemen. Excels in defensive capability, but slow. It's common to use it in groups of 3 squads or more.
- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsrhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

School Rules

Article 7

- In cases where the representatives of the chancellor's officers or student council are unable to act due to his/her absence, students can call for a student body meeting. Any decisions made during this student body meeting may be considered the willful decision of the Academy.

Article 12

- During confrontations with other Academies, eligible members of the chancellor's officers or student council have a duty to respond to challenges made by counterparts of near or equal standing.

Chapter 21: Worrier in the Twilight

CHAPTER 21

"The Worrier in the Twilight"



It's times like these.
That I'm not too sure.
What do I say?

Point Allocation (Reduction of Penalty)

It's times like these

That I'm not too sure

What do I say?

Point Allocation (Reduction of Penalty)

A white bedroom.

Thin beds, all surrounded by white curtains, were lined up under the white light of holy-technique illumination. This was a hospital room.

A young man was sleeping on one of the beds; a girl sat by the bedside.

The girl was tending to one of the young man's legs with her two prosthetic arms.

His right leg.

The skin of the leg was covered by parchments of holy-technique contracts to such an extent that it looked like papier-mâché, and the girl continued to plaster charms onto it. However, the charms were gradually falling away from where they had been applied, crumbling with a glow of light and revealing the skin beneath.

Beneath the charms was deep purple skin, swollen and bloated, like it had absorbed a large amount of water. The thickness of the right leg was almost several times that of the left one.

"...Master Muneshige, why do you not think of an easier way to win? You always fight the enemy head-on."

The girl whispered to herself. She took a new holy-technique charm from the box labeled, "Medical Officers' Property," and applied it to his leg while saying: "If this continues, I will never cease to worry. It is already dawn, but you..."

She took a breath, her head bowing slightly.

"...Please. Please wake up soon."

The moment the words left her lips.

“Well, I’m awake since you said ‘please’, Gin-san.”

Surprised at this sudden voice, the girl, Gin, turned back; and Muneshige’s eyes were open.

His eyes were wet and slightly bloodshot, but they were focused on her.

“Have your worries ceased?”

Muneshige said with a weak smile. Hearing this, Gin’s face flushed a deep pink, and she dipped her head.

“...”

She took Muneshige’s swollen right leg and squeezed it.

“Ahh...”

A hoarse cry spilled from Muneshige’s throat.

“Ahhhh...!”

Muneshige flailed about like a fish out of water, but Gin’s left arm and the leg in its grip budged not an inch.

“Ah, that hur-wai- ahhhhhhhhhhh, ple-it huuuurts! Huh? You’re healing me? Huooooahhh!?”

Muneshige tapped out on the bed, but Gin remained standing there, taking deep breaths and forcing down the heat rising to her cheeks. She looked at him from the side.

“I suppose you have something to say...? Alright, start (empieza).”

“I-I’m sorry for worrying you, so sorry!”

“Tes. Anything else?”

“T-thank you very much f-for treating me!”

“...Anything else?”

“S-sorry for embarrassing you with my playfulness!”

Gin nodded, expressionless.

“Tes. Anything else?” She added.

“Ah-ahhhhhh, I-I’m just about at my limit, wai-I’m sweating weirdly!”

As Muneshige squirmed, noise started to spill in from the curtain behind Gin. It was the sound of many voices.

“Vice Squad Leader! Have you woken up!?”

“Ahhhhhhhhh! N-no, Gin-san! I-I can’t take anymoooreee!”

The door closed.

After a few seconds, the sound of footsteps walking away from the door and men and women muttering drifted into the room.

“The hell was that about, even though we were worrying so much the vice squad leader’s having the time of his life.”

“Jeez, the vice squad leader’s always making Gin-san do things like that... Thinking about Muneshige being a catcher gives me shivers...”

“Well, they say that all humans have a weakness...”

Adding on her right hand, Gin nodded twice, then thrice.

“So basically, this is what is commonly referred to as ‘the time of one’s life’.”

“No, y-you’re mistaken, the time of one’s life actually refers t-huh? What... huuuhhh? Wai-everything’s going white...!”

“Tes. Shall I increase my strength output?”

Hearing this, Muneshige sat up.

Holding his breath, he suddenly pushed himself up and leaned against the sitting Gin, hugging her close to him.

“U-um, I forgot to say something.”

“Tes. What might that be?”

Muneshige answered her.

“...I’m back. ...Oh, and forgive me.”

“Tes. Welcome back. I was waiting for you to say that.”

Gin smiled and hugged Muneshige back, wrapping her right arm around him.

She brought her left arm away from his leg, saying: “I have no complaints if you go to the no man’s land, but if you did not come back then I would be... troubled. Replacing Master Muneshige may be a simple task for others, but it is not the same for me.”

Gin embraced Muneshige again, a breath of relief spilling into his shoulder.

“I have concentrated healing on your legs instead of your chest. I have gathered all the medical holy-technique equipment on this ship that could not be used on other wounded. I can have you running until nine o’clock today.”

“...What’s going on outside?”

“Tes,” Gin said, before she continued on with a cold voice.

“Mikawa is destroyed, and Tres España’s Mikawa recon squad has teamed up with K.P.A. Italia’s Mikawa recon squad. It has been decided that, as representatives of the Testament Union, we will be taking over control of the area. The King of Musashi has considered raising an insurrection, and most of the authority held by the chancellor’s officers and student council now belongs to him. The provisional parliament, which leans towards the Testament Union, plans to yield Musashi to the Testament Union as a substitute for the town of Mikawa which is now rubble.”

“Wait a second.”

Muneshige looked up before starting to speak:

“Um...you just said that they planned to yield Musashi as ‘a substitute for the town of Mikawa’, right?”

Muneshige continued: “Then...the one who is taking the blame for the destruction of Mikawa, close correspondent of P.A. Oda and developer of armaments with New Nagoya Castle...”

“Tes. 6 PM today, the princess of Ariadust, Horizon, will be disassembled in the Andamio de la Ejecución on this ship. Earlier, the Shinto head priest who K.P.A. Italia brought with them confirmed her succession in an abbreviated ceremony and announced that she was a legitimate child. Horizon herself has also permitted this.”

Gin paused for a breath.

“The princess Horizon is an automaton, but her soul component has been assimilated into a Logismoí Óplo. The Logismoí Óplo is a weapon of mass-destruction, and for the disarmed Far East, its possession is illegal. As such, to assume responsibility for the destruction of Mikawa and simultaneously yield the Logismoí Óplo to the Testament Union, Princess Horizon will take her own life.”

Hearing these words, Muneshige’s shoulders trembled slightly. Looking down, he spoke: “K.P.A. Italia’s Pope-Chancellor must be on cloud seven. He just ambled over to have a look and accidentally found a Logismoí Óplo, whose owner just so happened to be caught in a situation where she’s forced to take responsibility by committing ritual suicide... And if that wasn’t enough, Musashi is being yielded to him as Mikawa’s replacement.”

“It appears that the residents of Musashi will be transferred to one of the residential areas in the Far East...one of Matsudaira’s other territories in the Edo period, Shinnai if I am not mistaken. The Matsudaira family Mito will replace the main family, and the recreation of the Testament’s descriptions will continue.”

“I see,” muttered Muneshige. He rested his forehead on Gin’s shoulder, heaving a sigh.

“If Musashi ceases to exist, then the residential areas will be all that’s left of the Far East... They’ll lose everything that could have really been called theirs. And for what? So K.P.A. Italia can have their petty little revenge in the name of *honor*.”

Gin nodded, “Tes,” and patted Muneshige on the back with her steel hand.

“On the other hand, our main squads have been exhausted. So...”

Gin propped her chin up on Muneshige’s shoulder. She seemed to be saying these next words not to him, but to the empty air behind him: “...We need to show the unharmed Master Muneshige to K.P.A. Italia. If the wielder of a Logismoí Óplo is with Tres España, K.P.A. Italia will be unable to use brute force

to get their way.”

“...We’re weakened by that much?”

“Tes. We have summoned a Tres Portugal armament trading fleet exiting from Sagami, but their arrival is estimated to be 7:00 PM. Other countries may send ships to draw K.P.A. Italia’s attention, but we cannot rely upon that chance.”

Muneshige nodded.

“Our country’s busy with the invincible fleet, ‘Grande y Felicísima Armada’, so they can’t afford to spare forces to send here...”

“That is the reason Master Muneshige was deployed here.”

“Well, I can’t really do anything except fight... And one more thing, Gin-san?”

“Yes?” Gin replied.

“What’s going on with Musashi now?” He asked.

“Tes. An escort team of around 300 men – Honda Futayo’s unit, we passed by her last night – are deployed in Musashi’s leading ship under K.P.A. Italia’s orders. Her men have secured all of Musashi, and it seems that the situation is still quite relaxed. It has been determined that a double collapse of the ley lines has not occurred, so the state of emergency in Musashi has been lifted.”

“So at the moment, by all appearances Musashi has resumed regular function... Then what about Musashi’s student council president and chancellor? Is he affected by that change of authority you spoke of earlier?”

“Tes. By the decision of the provisional council and the king of Musashi, Yoshinao-sama the Musashi King has taken over. In the beginning K.P.A. Italia tried to take over, but the Hexagone Française-born king would not allow it.”

Muneshige nodded again. After a small pause, he nodded once more: “About that...it seems that King Yoshinao used to handle negotiations with Tres España in the Pyrenees. He even argued with Hexagone Française for the sake of the people there. He’s a true ally of the weak.”

“How did a governor of that territory end up in Musashi?”

“In the past, Tres España and Hexagone Française were constructing a neutral merchant city but at the same time they were also fighting over it. Hexagone Française sent King Yoshinao to Musashi through the Testament Union, whittling down the local resentment. Whenever there was a conflict, he’d be there to settle everything. The king has both the ability and the will to maintain the neutrality and peace of a location regardless of any incidents. Hexagone Française knew this, that’s why they sent him to Musashi...”

“And now, he is protecting Musashi from the hand of K.P.A. Italia. From Hexagone Française’s view, the king they sent to Musashi through the Testament Union has deadlocked K.P.A. Italia by keeping Musashi neutral.”

Gin, still holding Muneshige, lifted him up. “But,” she said.

“From what Master Muneshige is saying, King Yoshinao is unable to do any more for Musashi. Depending on the situation, there is a possibility that Musashi will be put through what the king’s former territory was put through, and once again through the Testament Union.”

“Tes. It’s a difficult situation. The balance of power between all the nations comes to a point here. I happen to be one of those powers, but... Gin-san?”

“Yes?” Gin responded, and Muneshige’s body sunk downward. His body folding like a crane, he pressed himself against Gin’s waist. Resting his head on her thighs, the roof of his head came to lightly touch Gin’s abdomen.

“Let me stay like this for about half a minute.”

“...Is Tadakatsu-sama’s demise weighing on your mind?”

Gin asked before continuing on:

“He himself chose the manner of his death. Thinking about it overmuch is a stain on his decision.”

She took a breath.

“I received ‘Tonbokiri’ from Tadakatsu-sama, and I wish to give it to Futayo-sama.”

“...I wonder if she hates me.”

“I do not know. But the challenge remains, passed down to the next Honda.”

Saying this, Gin pressed Muneshige against her, pushing in on his back. Unseen by Muneshige, a feeble smile crossed her face, and her next words were ever so soft: “Master Muneshige, calm your heart. You must show your strength to others. I shall be the one to take charge of all your weakness. Indeed... I hope you will entrust me with them, as much as you are willing.”

Chapter 22: Unconcerned Colleagues

CHAPTER 22

"Unconcerned Colleagues"



Of an era alike?
Of an era bygone?
Of an error it sprang?
Point Allocation (Adult)

Of an era alike?

Of an era bygone?

Of an error it sprang?

Point Allocation (Adult)

A girl swiftly walked down the long hallway, lit up by rays of sunshine.

Her black hair waved in the air as she walked, and she was dressed in a black and white uniform. The girl wore a nametag on which the name “Asama” was written, and the corridor she walked was lined with the doorplates of different classes. The corridor lay on the second floor of the outer building in Musashi Ariadust Academy.

“It’s quite a bit before eight, I guess no one would be here...”

As she walked, Asama stared at the door at the end of the corridor with her bichromatic eyes. It was the door to her class, the third year Plum Class.

...The state of emergency in Musashi has finally lifted, but...what should I do?

There were quite a lot of things to do last night, so I ended up going to bed in the morning.

There wasn’t a big uproar or anything. After all, the Provisional Council started their deliberations once it was confirmed that Mikawa had been destroyed. And because of that all citizens were instructed by security squads to stay in their houses.

However, the Asama shrine – Asama’s home – confirmed their status as a proxy for the Mikawa shrine which had disappeared. Due to this and a request from the security squads, there was a need to prepare for the Phenomena that would result from disharmony in the Ether.

...Well, I had already steeled myself to some degree since I was on night watch for the shrine last night.

The atmosphere was tense; and if the situation continued to be a mass of unknowns, some form of mental stress was to be expected.

But as a result of Musashi being divided into separate ships and the night watch closing the gates between the ships, nobody went back and forth between the ships even if news and information did. The only incidents that occurred were responses against people who left their houses against all instructions.

Due to the load on the divine communication channels, Mice of different kinds could be seen scurrying about the roads or flying through the skies. It was surprising to have a small shadow suddenly flit past; and I handled three cases of Mice getting lost and being brought to me in tears by the security squads.

And I heard that during the meeting between the Provisional Council and the representative of the Testament Union, it had been decided that Horizon would be dismantled and Musashi would be handed over. All this had happened before the state of emergency in Musashi had been lifted.

Despite this, there was no big response in Musashi. More accurately...

“We couldn’t do anything even if we wanted to...”

Musashi belonged to the Lord of Mikawa, Lord Motonobu. That same Lord Motonobu had engineered the destruction of Mikawa. Also, Musashi itself is devoid of any weapons. Well, there’s the anti-artillery gravity shields, which make use of gravity control fields normally used against strong winds; but those are only good for local protection. It would be extremely difficult to appropriate them for offensive purposes.

...We have nothing that we can rely upon and use to act, to do something...

Added to this, Tres España, the biggest military, and K.P.A. Italia, the head of the Catholic Church and the Testament Union, are in our vicinity. If we act out of turn in a situation like this, Musashi’s very existence would be called into question.

And hammering in the point, K.P.A. Italia’s broadcast personnel are broadcasting videos of Mikawa’s destruction and the state of the affected areas: videos of the ruins of the annihilated Mikawa, the towns that tumbled into fissures, and the crowds of people evacuating from the unaffected outskirts. Images and interviews with wounded soldiers also being broadcast; this all serves to emphasize the seriousness of the situation.

As I was coming to the Academy, I would occasionally see crimson Ether lights rising into the sky above Mikawa. Most likely a disturbed Ley Line forcing the clots within itself out into a medium with less resistance: the sky.

In a situation like this, people aren't whispering resistance against the decision of the Provisional Council.

...They're saying, "What else can we do?"

The Provisional Council has decided to use the transport ships that had brought commodities in and out of the residential area as a temporary refuge for the evacuating citizens of Mikawa. The arrangement was to link them up with Musashi and provide life-support spell charms.

That's why I could see a bunch of transport ships headed to the Mikawa outskirts as I was coming here. But the amount of actual citizens in the towns are few; more common is the sight of security squads. A view rarely seen. It's situations like this that cause impurities, making it easier for Phenomena to occur.

"..."

Asama stopped in front of the classroom. Taking a hand mirror from her sleeve, she examined her face and hair.

I may have gone to bed in the morning, but I guaranteed myself six hours of sleep with a charm of compressed slumber.

...Even then I slept through the morning's purification ceremony, only to be awoken by Hanami...

I guess using the IZUMO-made DMT water-heater "Hot-water ATARISHOCK" on the shrine's spring was a bad idea. Dad just likes new stuff way too much. He said that at the Kyuushuu shrine, the grass creatures who inhabit Africa would take away our fatigue; but is that really the right way to go about things? Or maybe I just like animals too much?"

"Well, that's that."

What should I do? Dad's handling communications with other shrines, especially the ones in the other countries. There've even been rules laid down for

posts regarding Musashi on the IZUMO and Shirasago Industry sponsored divine communication channel/community site for shrines. My only role is to periodically update with current information, I don't have to handle the deluge of questions from the outside. If those rules were taken away things would get loud pretty quickly, but even that's better than what's happening now.

Everyone's probably in the same boat.

...What do I do?

Putting away the mirror, she brought her hand to touch the door. *I'm the first one. I guess that's unsettling?* Asama thought.

But when everyone comes and sees that I'm here before them, they'll probably feel a little bit more secure. So...

"...Well then."

She opened the door, revealing...

"Toori-kun!?"

The classroom was lit up by thin strands of sunlight slanting in from the windows. Toori was slumped over on the window seat of the row furthest back.

His torso was spread out over the desk in front of him, and he lay completely still.

Asama, shocked, took a step into the classroom; but a voice stopped her.

"He got quite a scolding at the nighthouse. The rest of us were sent home early, but Toori-kun was left here."

Recognizing Neshinbara's voice, Asama turned around.

"You guys..."

Starting with Neshinbara, there were several figures already in the classroom.

Neshinbara stopped, his fingers that had previously been dancing across the sign frame before him falling still. He turned to face Asama. His eyes, visible through his glasses, were obviously suffering from lack of sleep. Despite this, they shined with resolve as he stared at her.

"Welcome to the meeting place of the Student Council and Chancellor's

Officers – minus their authority. Everyone else will be along shortly.”

His voice, though quiet, rang through the classroom.

“Principal Sakai is being debriefed in the checkpoint below and will be unable to attend, but there’s lots to decide before he comes back. Specifically, what we wish to do regarding the fates of Horizon Ariadust and Musashi.”

In the mountains, at the midpoint of a valley, there lies a building with a large wooden terrace.

“Mikawa Mountaintop Eastern Checkpoint” was written on the doorplate to this checkpoint, which connected Musashi to Mikawa.

There were at the moment several cargo vehicles parked in the clearing used to manage the exchange of goods between the ship and the city.

This in itself would not be strange; but they remained there, with no indication that they were moving goods or cargo at all. There was nothing being brought out from the checkpoint’s transport warehouse. The owners of the goods were mingling with the people nearby, sitting on the floor and lost in conversation or playing strategy games with their mobile messengers.

All they did was respond to the occasional calls from the management office, walking over when they were called.

There were two people gazing down at the relaxed motions of the crowd from the terrace above.

Sakai and the automaton “Musashi”.

Sakai was reclining on the chair that accompanied a table fixed with a parasol in the old Japanese style. He was drinking tea served by “Musashi” who was standing at his side.

“ ‘Musashi’-san, I’m...totally under house arrest, aren’t I?”

“Judge. I believe this because you wandered around last night saying ‘I’ll go back once I’ve had something to drink.’ Because of this, you were unable to return to me before the state of emergency was declared and were taken into custody by K.P.A. Italia here. Over.”

“Weellll...” said Sakai, holding his teacup out to “Musashi”.

“It would’ve been easy for me to run away; but I couldn’t’ve just left the people in the outskirts like that, could I? There were lots of people there who knew me, and it took quite a lot of time to evacuate them onto the mountain.”

“Musashi” stared at the teacup offered to her by Sakai, but she showed no sign of filling it. Puzzled, Sakai looked at her.

“Are you angry? C’mon, I just came here to meet an old friend and I had nothing to do with what happened here. And during my debriefing they even used spells to confirm that I was telling the truth. Well, that means that...I didn’t do anything wrong, right?”

“Musashi” glanced up at the sky. Lowering her gaze again, she turned to the right and raised her right hand. Conjuring a sign frame of a simple Torii-design before her eyes, she switched the screen to a list of entries.

“ ‘Didn’t do anything wrong?’ Sakai-sama’s residence is on the surface of Okutama, and all cleaning, laundry, cooking and errands are left to the captain of Okutama, ‘Okutama’. Your clothes are left lying everywhere, your books are left lying everywhere, you extort from ‘Okutama’, ‘screw Greenpeace, I’m leaving the light in the bathroom on,’ the middle toenail of your right foot is ingrown – you are the worst. And it seems that you force ‘Okutama’ to do most of your paperwork. Sakai-sama, do you know the meaning of the word ‘adult’? Over.”

“But Tama-chan is so capable~.”

“Judge. Because ‘Okutama’ is also the caretaker of Ariadust Academy, her management ability is particularly high. Despite this, I am often forced to act when Sakai-sama’s unreasonable demands cause problems with ‘Okutama’s’ operation of her ship. A few days ago, you forced her to watch your special black-plated set of the superhero series ‘Southern Dynasty Cult MASASHIGE’ in your place because you wanted to get them out of the way, and I watched it as well through shared memory; but it seemed that from the middle of the season onwards it was just development after development of the hero doing fine and then being weighed down by his companions, which was extremely disappointing. Over.”

“There’s the new series ‘Blood-vessels Bursting Resolution TOKYO’, but I feel like I’ll be killed if I make her watch that...”

“No, automatons serve humans, so we do not kill them. We just take other measures. Over.”

Sakai nodded hurriedly.

“I really wish I could let you meet Kazuno down in Mikawa. It feels like all management automatons are so uptight about things.”

“It is required for management automatons to be fair regarding issues with fellow automatons, so systems that process temporary emotions are separated from the systems that handle speech and behavior. Over.”

“...Oh? If they aren’t connected then that means that you act completely separately from your emotions?”

Hearing this, “Musashi” looked at Sakai, expressionless.

“I am different from the majority, but yes. Was there something bothering you? Over.”

“Yeah, so basically what you’re saying is that the secret that you hide away actually has a high opinion of me?”

Having been asked this, “Musashi” nodded twice at Sakai before looking to the sky.

She opened up a new sign frame, inputting several commands.

“I am very sorry. Though I am currently operating in my official capacity, I have complained to several of my kin. Approximately 112GB of information was delivered in the space of a second, low in terms of data, so rest assured. Over.”

“Eh, but knowing that, how do I close the distance between us?”

Ignoring Sakai’s question, “Musashi” looked toward the southern sky. Occasionally, red lights would erupt from beyond the mountains, shooting up into the sky. They were not as glaring as the sunlight, but...

“Ley Line lights, huh.”

“Musashi” gave her knowledge on the light they could see.

“The destruction of the crust has severed the Ley Line path, but the ocean is flowing in and restoring the path. I predict the Ley Line disturbance will produce monsters, strange phenomena, and mutated aquatic life forms over the next few years; but it should become an excellent fishing site if the Ley Line tuning is continued. Over.”

“Given the state of the world, it’s hard to say when the tuning would even begin. ...How were things for you last night?”

“Judge.”

“Musashi” nodded and looked away from Mikawa. She checked to make sure the table set’s paper umbrella would open, raised the latch, and angled it toward the sun.

“Last night when Mikawa was destroyed, a large amount of noise arrived through the Ley Line. We had predicted this, so we avoided it by shutting off the external ether supply; but...” “Musashi” thought for a moment. “To refer to it in a human manner, I suppose I should say it ‘peeled away the flesh’. The Ley Line path is primarily underground, so it created tremendous noise through the mountain. Over.”

“Ley Line noise is tough for automatons, isn’t it?”

“Judge. A lot is difficult for automatons. And, Sakai-sama, now that you mention automatons...” She turned only her gaze toward Sakai and suddenly spoke. “It makes me want to ask about Horizon-sama. Over.”

“You like suddenly bringing up topics I’ve been avoiding, don’t you?”

“Judge. By means of succession she is our owner, after all. ...Of course, if she commits suicide our ownership will transfer to the Testament Union. Over.”

“What would happen then? Would you stop being ‘Musashi’-san and become ‘Mikawa’-san?”

“If I am transferred there, I must obey. The fewer than one hundred thousand citizens of Musashi will be moved to the Edo Matsudaira territory. I believe you were once in control of the Edo territory.”

“That was before I came here. The Edo territory isn’t maintained at all, though. I had no motivation, so I would just go see the ruins in the mountains and have fun. It would be a pain to move there now.”

“Musashi” then sighed as a means of expression. She even voiced the “hahh”.

“Do you not want to rescue Horizon-sama? Over.”

Sakai heavily rested his chin on his hand and groaned.

“I’m the man who wasn’t able to stop Lord Nobuyasu’s suicide, you know? And I’m not a student, so I have no authority to act.”

“Judge. I am aware of that. But I was not asking whether you were thinking about stopping it. I have a general idea of how you have led the students. Over.”

“A ‘general’ idea, hm?” said Sakai. “Then what is your ‘general’ estimation of what they’ll do now?”

“Well...”

Just as “Musashi” was about to answer, the door to the terrace opened and a single figure entered.

The figure was an automatic doll in a maid uniform. She had short hair and gave a bow.

“ ‘Shinagawa’ has arrived. Sakai-sama, I have checked over your records and completed your bail procedure. ‘Musashi’-sama, I have completed the work on your various deeds. Over.”

Sakai raised his head to look at “Shinagawa” who was awaiting further orders. For an instant, he met “Musashi’s” gaze and they exchanged a nod to indicate their previous conversation was over.

And...

“ ‘Shinagawa’, are you saying we can go home?”

“Judge.”

“Shinagawa” nodded, Sakai let out a whistle, and “Shinagawa” began to speak

once more.

“The Testament Union’s automatons and ‘Asakusa’ are currently running a comparison on the incoming cargo inspection the Testament Union had run yesterday. I have determined that will be completed by midday. It is fortunate we invited Azuma-sama aboard the other night. In preparation for his arrival, the Testament Union had performed a safety check over our cargo and the inside of the ship at our previous port. That allows us to quickly prove that we had no way of participating in this event. Over.”

“Occasionally, the Testament Union actually proves useful. ...Anyway, ‘Shinagawa’, what about the people I had evacuated last night?”

“Judge.” “Shinagawa” nodded and turned toward the foot of the mountain. “The interiors to the support transport ships traveling with Musashi were used to create residences. A temporary city has been formed. The ships contained a reserve package for creating residences, so we used everything but what the ships actually need. All 1111 evacuees have been accommodated. Over.”

“Shinagawa” stopped speaking there. “Musashi” also said nothing.

Instead of speaking, the two of them stared at Sakai.

With both their gazes on him, he looked back and forth between them and finally spoke.

“Oh, well done, ‘Shinagawa’. Thanks.”

“Judge. Thank you very much, Sakai-sama.”

“Judge. Well done catching on, Sakai-sama.”

“...Why is one of you treating me much more warmly than the other?”

Sakai stretched a bit and looked down into the plaza below the terrace.

“Then let’s get back. You two have work to deal with and I want to get some sleep in my-...”

He was unable to finish his sentence.

A sudden voice came from next to “Shinagawa” by the door to the terrace.

“Are you leaving already? I was hoping to greet you.”

It was a low and reverberating voice. “Shinagawa” turned around in shock.

“A demon!?”

“Indeed,” said the red-bodied man who was over three meters tall. The horns on his head swayed as he spoke. “I am Galileo of Heliocentrism, former president of K.P.A. Italia’s Padova Academy.”

But his words were not the end of it.

Another voice arrived on top of the demon’s. This new voice was also low.

“This king of heresy is not the only one here.”

A white cloak appeared from behind Galileo.

Sakai spoke the name of the man with disheveled black hair.

“Papa-Schola Innocentius.”

“It’s been a while, Sakai Tadatsugu.”

As he spoke, Innocentius’ mouth formed a smile. His teeth were visible, but his eyebrows were raised.

“This time, I have the higher position. How about that, hm?”

Five figures faced each other below the blue sky and above the wooden terrace.

They were ten meters apart. One side was made up of Sakai standing before two automatic dolls and the other side was made up of the tall demon and Papa-Schola Innocentius.

Innocentius spoke with both his hands in his pockets.

“This king of heresy said he wanted to go check on the situation in Mikawa. I’m glad I came along. I never thought you would be stuck here. Your bodyguards are down below, so how about we have a bit of a reunion, hm?”

As he spoke and showed off his teeth, “Musashi” tapped Sakai’s shoulder.

Sakai turned toward her and she nodded.

“Hurry up and apologize. Over.”

“Wait just a minute. I can’t exactly say judge to that. At least ask for the reason first.”

Hearing that, Innocentius gave a bitter laugh.

“Back when he was chancellor, he made a fool of K.P.A. Italia.”

“Judge.”

“Musashi” tapped Sakai’s shoulder once more, but Sakai brushed off her hand and ignored her.

Instead, he sighed and spoke.

“Pope, how many years have you been chancellor now? How about you forget about some of those older things?”

“Sakai-sama, the captains other than ‘Musashi’ were added to Musashi during the great remodeling ten years ago, so we do not know what happened before that. ...What did you do to them? Over.”

Before answering “Shinagawa’s” question, Sakai stared at Innocentius’ face and sighed again.

“Well, it was just over twenty years ago, I think. Simply put, that stupid pope was plotting a major Catholic advance on Musashi. And yet the history recreation of that missionary work had supposedly ended when the anti-religion law was recreated as a result of the Shimabara Rebellion, which we held an early recreation of fifty years ago.”

“That’s what the Far East claimed, anyway,” said Innocentius slowly. “According to the Testament descriptions, the Shimabara Rebellion occurred about ten years ago during 1637. Holding the history recreation forty years early was a means of eliminating the Catholics before they could even begin work in the Far East. And that’s how the Far East brought about the anti-religion law that shouldn’t have existed at that point.” He took a breath. “The Matsudaira clan issued the anti-religion law in 1614. The advanced recreation moved that up by 15 years. I was merely attempting to compensate for what we lost in that time, but then you interfered.”

Sakai nodded in response to Innocentius’ words. He brushed aside

“Musashi’s” hand as she tapped his shoulder again and then he turned toward her.

“ ‘Musashi’-san, do you understand now? He’s the type that can’t take a joke.”

“You should be glad. He has apparently been stalking you for twenty or so years. Over.”

“Musashi’s” comment caused Galileo’s shoulders to shake.

He was laughing bitterly.

“How interesting, former boy. If I had been a student at the time, I think I could have made some nice memories.”

“Galileo, do not forget the debt you owe me for letting you make those memories now.”

“Of course,” said Galileo. “I never thought I would relinquish my position as president and become a student. Then again, being K.P.A. Italia’s vice chancellor is useful for researching the Apocalypse. Holding a position below a former student is a new experience, so I think I will try living much longer.”

“And I never thought my teacher would be one of my subordinates. I occasionally recall the past and almost bow to you despite being pope.”

As the two men laughed, Sakai moved. He tapped “Musashi’s” shoulder and peered into her face.

“Those two are laughing, but do you find anything funny about their conversation?”

“Judge. Toori-sama would have interrupted their conversation. Over.”

“What was that about Musashi’s Mr. Impossible who had his authority as chancellor taken?” Innocentius removed a hand from his pocket and scratched his nose. “Sakai, how is the Far East right now?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m asking if you can settle this like you did back then, got it?” Innocentius bent over once and then peered at Sakai. “Back then, while we fought for over

three days and three nights, your friend – Sakakibara was it? – marched into the Testament Union. His actions brought support for the Far East from the Protestants, England, and even Hexagone Française. And that concluded the history recreation of Shimabara and the anti-religion law.”

“Testament,” said Galileo. “It was an excellent method. You made it look like you would settle the dispute using a duel between chancellors as per the academy rules, but you actually led the different nations to accept the history recreation by pressuring the Testament Union. Using the chancellor as a decoy was most excellent, former boy. And that prevented K.P.A. Italia from making its large-scale advance on Musashi and the Far East.”

“We could not expand the Catholic foundation, we lost trade routes in Protestant and newly prosperous nations, and we were defeated.” Innocentius lowered the hand scratching his nose and laughed quietly. “Ha ha. If we had been able to work for those fifteen years, I know we could have created a powerful Catholic foundation in the Far East and then into the other nations. After all, we had calculated out all our predictions before taking action. The Far East had hastened the recreation of the Testament descriptions for your advantage, so justice was on our side. If we had been able to make up for those lost 15 years, we could have prevented K.P.A. Italia’s collapse.” He took a breath. “Or at least delay it until the Apocalypse.”

He laughed again.

“Hey.” The pope took a breath and looked up. “K.P.A. Italia lost to the Far East’s strategy. I understand that, but the battle between K.P.A. Italia and the Far East isn’t over yet, is it?”

Listen.

“This time, it is the Far East that will lose to K.P.A. Italia’s strategy.”

Innocentius pulled his chin back and gave Sakai an upturned look.

“Musashi’s chancellors have always been incompetent. That is why you, Mikawa’s chancellor, were the one to face me back then. Since then, the Testament Union has been working to weaken the Chancellor’s Officers of the different Far East reservations.”

“Is that your twenty-year-long strategy?”

“Your acquisition of a Logismoí Óplo was unexpected. ...As is customary of the warring states, you must make up for it by means of suicide. In exchange for the loss of Mikawa and its productive power, you must pay with the life of your ruler and with the Musashi. After all, we must think about the coming Apocalypse and we must face P.A. Oda and this Genesis Project of theirs. So if we obtained a Logismoí Óplo...” Innocentius turned toward “Musashi”. “K.P.A. Italia will transfer ownership of the Musashi from the Far East to the Testament Union and make it a substitute city for Mikawa. And we will place the Logismoí Óplo there so it can be used as the front line against P.A. Oda.”

“Shinagawa” moved in response to this.

“That is...”

She took a step forward in protest.

And in that instant, Innocentius and Galileo vanished.

It took Sakai a short moment before he realized what had happened.

He understood *what* had happened, but he did not know *why* it had happened. That created a time lag before his response.

“...!?”

The next thing he knew, something was behind him.

...They circled behind me with some kind of movement technique!?

With that thought, he wrapped his arms around “Musashi” and “Shinagawa’s” waists and leaped forward.

“Sakai-sama!? Over.”

He ignored “Musashi’s” voice, moved several meters forward, shoved “Shinagawa” to the left, shoved “Musashi” to the right, and spun around.

...What was that?

He did not know. But it was clear that a presence had arrived behind him.

And to check who it was, he glanced in the direction of his previous location.

“...!?”

But they were gone. Based on the sudden presence behind him, Innocentius and Galileo should have been standing there, but he saw nothing but the table set and the empty terrace.

...Then where did they go?

As soon as he had that thought...

“What is it, former boy?”

Sakai turned toward a voice that once more came from behind him.

When he looked back, he saw the pope-chancellor and Galileo standing there.

They were back to their position in front of the staircase. Their stance and position were exactly the same as before.

It was as if they had momentarily vanished and then reappeared.

But to his right, “Musashi” frowned and spoke.

“They definitely moved. But I had not switched to a defensive stance, so I was unable to capture them. Over.”

“Well, I don’t expect you to understand, automaton.”

Sakai heard Galileo take a breath.

“This is a heretical spell.”

Innocentius lightly elbowed Galileo’s back and smiled bitterly.

“Try not to do that while I’m watching.”

“That is why I am standing behind you, former student. Ha ha.” As Galileo laughed, he turned toward Sakai. “Former boy, the next time we meet, you may no longer hold the position of president.”

“That’ll be a relief. With the demotion and the loss of Mikawa, I’ve had way too much to worry about.”

“My former student never said anything about you being the type to worry about that sort of thing.”

Galileo tapped Innocentius' shoulder.

"I've heard about it. When that man takes action, his comrades are already on the move. And when he doesn't take action..." Innocentius paused. "His comrades take action on their own."

"That sounds about right. My comrades were a lot more skilled than me."

"But what about now, former boy? What will your students do when you do not take action?" Galileo took a breath. "I had not heard that you were the type to simply do nothing."

As if agreeing with Galileo's words, Innocentius turned his back.

The two of them faced the door from the terrace and walked out.

And as the two of them disappeared through the door, Innocentius spoke.

"Either way, whatever happens, and whatever may be, K.P.A. Italia will take back what it lost. We will take land as glory, money as honor, life as pride, and belief as hope."

"Even if that means losing one of the lives that we have now?"

"Testament," was his reply. "Our battle resulted in the ruin of K.P.A. Italia and the fall of Catholicism. And do not forget that the present is still flowing. In the great flow of destiny, our lost fifteen years and the future of the Far East are equivalent to the choice of a single girl."

The door closed, but the words continued.

"Do not reject the flow of the present. Doing so would be the same as rejecting our battle back then, hm?"

Study: **Religion on Musashi**

●Religion on Musashi●



"Nee-chan! Nee-chan! There are lots of foreigners on Musashi, but what about their religion!? If the Far East can't persecute them won't there be eroge-like developments in the torture room!?"



"Fufufu, idiot brother, this really is bothersome so you'd be better off making a thread about this, but have you heard about the Prohibited Religion Act?"



"Ah, of course I do! The order to teach forbidden matters to people, right!? In song: 'Lulululalalala, ABNORMAL IS CRIMINAL, LET'S BOMBER HOO~LI~GAN~~' kind of violating poetry recitation!"



"Fufufu, idiot brother, the theory and practice of this act differ so be careful not to mix them up. Basically, under the Prohibited Religion Act, the Far East will not accept any religion other than Shinto and Buddhism."



"Wait, but there are a lot of Tsrhc and Mlasi here, no? I remember getting in the way of Valentine and Christmas celebrations from long ago."



"Yes, this is where 'Interpretation' comes in. To list:"

1. "Prohibited Religion Tax"

2. "Missionary Activity Ban"

3. "Specialization of Worship Places Ban. Scale Restriction"



"(1) here is essentially replacing the 'Ignoring Prohibited Religions' aspect here. By introducing tax as a method of handling 'those that are not present', as long as there is no missionary work, the Far East is doing the same thing as forbidding those religions. Now, for a general follower, the tax payment is one Blessing per day, or any equivalent, appropriate amount of currency. This is about 3000 Yen for the Far East."



"Wait, that is expensive! Isn't that too high? Is this legal?"



"Well, we're forbidding religions after all. Still, for newly appointed foreigners in trade and diplomacy, being able to pay this is a display of status, and many would rather pay the tax to retain their lifestyle in the end. That is why Musashi's second left and right ships have foreigner-centric towns in the lower floor, and matters for each country are handled separately. Children are exempt from the tax as well.

Still, if one wishes to become a follower he/she will undergo a process to become 'hidden', and they will incur the full price of the tax. If you can't pay you'll have to do manual labour. People in higher positions will also have to pay more. Now, the Specialization of Worship Places Ban forbids the construction/possession of any building specialized for religious service. Thus sites like churches, congregation halls and contract stands can only be founded on corporation and personal spaces, like shops and houses. This is also a recreation of 'hiding', though they still put signs out in reality."



"...Hey, Nee-chan, there is too much explanation for me to put a joke into."



"...So you were not looking to understand, but for a gag chance instead?"

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! There are lots of foreigners on Musashi, but what about their religion!? If the Far East can't persecute them ^[1] won't there be eroge-like developments in the torture room!?

Kimi: Fufufu, idiot brother, this really is bothersome so you'd be better off making a thread about this; but have you heard about the Prohibited Religion Act?

Toori: Ah, of course I do! The order to teach forbidden matters to people, right!? In song: "Lulululalalala, ABNORMAL IS CRIMINAL, LET'S BOMBER HOO~LI~GAN~~" kind of violating poetry recitation!

Kimi: Fufufu, idiot brother, the theory and practice of this act differ so be careful not to mix them up. Basically, under the Prohibited Religion Act, the Far East will not accept any religion other than Shinto and Buddhism.

Toori: Wait, but there are a lot of Tsirhc and Mlasi here, no? I remember getting in the way of Valentine and Christmas celebrations from long ago.

Kimi: Yes, this is where 'Interpretation' comes in. To list:

1. Prohibited Religion Tax
2. Missionary Activity Ban
3. Specialization of Worship Places Ban. Scale Restriction

Kimi: (1) here is essentially replacing the 'Ignoring Prohibited Religions' aspect here. By introducing tax as a method of handling 'those that are not present', as long as there is no missionary work, the Far East is doing the same thing as forbidding those religions. Now, for a general follower the tax payment is one Bless per day, or any equivalent, appropriate amount of currency. This is about 3000 Yen for the Far East.

Toori: Wait, that is expensive! Isn't that too high? Is this legal?

Kimi: Well, we're forbidding religions after all. Still, for newly appointed foreigners in trade and diplomacy, being able to pay this is a display of status; and many would rather pay the tax to retain their lifestyle in the end. That is why Musashi's second left and right ships ^[2] have foreigner-centric towns in the

lower decks, and matters for each country are handled separately. Children are exempt from the tax as well.

Still, if one wishes to become a follower he/she will undergo a process to become 'hidden', and they will incur the full price of the tax. If you can't pay you'll have to do manual labor ^[3]. People in higher positions will also have to pay more. Now, the Specialization of Worship Places Ban forbids the construction/possession of any building specialized for religious service. Thus sites like churches, congregation halls and Contract Stands can only be founded on corporation and personal spaces, like shops and houses. This is also a recreation of 'hiding', though they still put signs out in reality.

With this restriction, large-scale movements can be prevented while protecting the religious rights of the people at the same time. Do you understand?

Toori: ...Hey, Nee-chan, there is too much explanation for me to put a joke into.

Kimi: ...So you were not looking to understand, but for a gag chance instead?

Chapter 23: Skeptics in the Meeting Session

CHAPTER 23

"Skeptics in the Meeting Session"



Even if there is doubt
Will it be settled, or
Can it be settled

Point Allocation (The Cooperative Personality)

Even if there is doubt

Will it be settled, or

Can it be settled

Point Allocation (The Cooperative Personality)

In a classroom where the sun shines in.

The eastern sunlight, still a dim ambiance, slightly lights up the classroom and the students inside from the side.

The desks in the class are mostly filled.

Yet, they are not in a state of calm, nor are they in a state of silence.

At this moment, one is standing and conveying words to the rest; Heidi, whose seat is next to Shirojiro's.

And putting a number of sign frames into order and looking around her vicinity...

"So the ones not attending are Miriam, Mito and Masa, as well as Seijun and Azuma, then..."

"After that," Heidi spoke as she turned to look at the seat farthest back by the window.

Toori's figure was there, not appearing to be awake. Remaining face down on his desk, he showed no signs of movement.

Looking at him, Asama called Hanami out and typed a few letters into her signframe: "He was taken to the police station last night, then seems to have arrived first this morning."

Noriki, Urquiaga and Neshinbara nodded as if to answer. Neshinbara brought out his signframe: "The rest of us were allowed to leave immediately, but Aoi-kun... He had quite a few more offenses before this so they had a lot to admonish him for."

Everyone hung their heads hearing that message. They then brought out their own sign frames, by themselves or through their Mice.

“Well, he did climb up the trees and streetlamps without any reason a lot of the time.”

“He led the residential block admins into sticky situations every so often as well.”

“Not to mention Lane 11 of Tama’s outer shell becoming a world of cats because of his incessant feeding, as far as I know...”

“Why is everyone not choosing to follow through, I wonder?”

In response to Heidi’s message, everyone waved their hands left and right. Heidi herself mouthed the words ‘well can’t help it’, and then after a pause...

“Toori-kun doesn’t seem to be moving, so won’t the rest of us think about various things? ...Come on, Erimaki.”

While surveying the members present, Heidi held her hand out in Shirojiro’s direction and called their white fox Mouse.

In response to her gesture, Erimaki ran up to her shoulder and glanced at the number of sign frames expanding before it.

“The situation then, to start. ...Putting it bluntly, Horizon and Musashi are in trouble.”

Thus Heidi began.

“Musashi will be transferred as a replacement for the town of Mikawa, and we as its residents will have to go over to the Matsudaira territory in Edo. Horizon will have the Logismoí Óplo she illegally possesses extracted from her; and to take responsibility for Mikawa’s destruction, it has been decided that she will commit suicide.”

But, Heidi continued.

“Not only myself, but the Treasurer Shiro-kun, the Secretary Neshinbara and the Chancellor and President Toori-kun; all our rights are withheld by King Yoshinao, so we cannot have a say in this. The Vice President Seijun still has her authority, but as the Provisional Council has taken her into themselves she seems to be on the Testament Union’s side. Anyway, we’d like to think about

what we can do about this without causing any trouble.”

Heidi collected her breath after saying all of that. Turning her head to look over everyone once...

“Then, from here onwards we’ll be hearing everyone’s courses of action.”

Heidi altered her expression into a more formal manner.

“Ignoring the many obstacles we will encounter, does anyone want to save Horizon and stop Musashi’s transfer?”

Thus Heidi asked, raising her hand.

But everyone in the classroom, even him...

“...Eh, is no one raising their hand up?”

There was a response to her inquiry. It was Noriki’s voice, who said while touching the bandage on his cheek: “We have nothing to work with. ...How about listing all of that first?”

“I see,” Kimi said while spreading out a fashion magazine and cutting important details out with a scissors.

Kimi raised her gaze and looked at Heidi with a tilted face, and said:

“The average person would be like ‘don’t get me involved, please’, wouldn’t they? Both the Provisional Council and King Yoshinao seem like they will accept Horizon’s suicide and Musashi’s transfer, no? Would the trend be, then, to let those take their course and wash their hands off where they are not involved, I wonder.”

A moment.

“Anyone’s ideal situation would be: Horizon dying or whatever, just spare us this transfer of Musashi, wouldn’t it? There’s still room for discussion on that part after all, isn’t there? Well?”

“Judge,” answered Heidi. She stole a glance to the south, towards an unseen land port they would go to, obscured by the hills and mountains. Furthermore...

“You know, Horizon still succeeded as Motonobu’s legitimate daughter, informal as the ceremony is. Thus his authority over Mikawa as a monarch, his

rights as the representative of the Far East to the Testament Union, as well as his ownership of Musashi; all of that has been succeeded by Horizon.”

Thus...

“If Horizon commits suicide, where do you think those rights will go?”

“Heh heh heh. How silly! Do you think I can answer that!? Umm, the sky! Towards the evening!”

“Don’t just answer randomly!!”

“Hmm...” Heidi turned to face Kimi, with a smile that gives off an impression that it is not.

“You know? If Horizon commits suicide there will be no successor, and all her rights will be taken by the Testament Union. Ownership of the Far East’s core organization, the Musashi Ariadust Academy, the authority of Mikawa’s monarch that will rule the Far East; all of that will be under the Testament Union’s care.”

“Do you understand?”

“The Far East will belong to the Testament Union.”

Everyone ceased their voices at those words.

Heidi, the only one smiling, faced everyone and spoke.

“If Horizon commits suicide, the Far East will belong to the Testament Union. There will be no room for negotiations nor will there be for anything else. ... That is why I think the Testament Union was in such a hurry to recognize Horizon’s succession. If they were to take hold of Motonubu’s authority as it is, the problem of Horizon’s succession will arise. But if they were to take her in, hold her accountable as his legitimate child and allow the suicide to occur, they will be able to obtain all rights to the Far East without any problem.”

“Then,” Heidi prefaced without changing her smiling expression.

“Are you getting off? Are you staying? The choice is yours.”

To those words, there was one response: Kimi’s voice. She shrugged her shoulders, and said with a bitter smile: “So it’s not ‘Are you getting on? Are you

not?' then?"

"Judge, we are Musashi's residents after all."

"I see," Noriki said, holding his arms, adjusting his sitting position and looking at Heidi with a nod.

"I have a lot of younger siblings. Even with the slight will interpretation spell the whole Far Eastern area possesses... I won't be able to support them all in another place."

"In that case, give me your sisters! Your sisters! By all means!"

"...This is the first time Nai-chan has heard someone say that personally."

"Heh heh. Margot, never once did I pay a possessor of such twisted love any mind. I'll rot if I do."

"Look who's talking!!"

Naruze formed a pout in response to everyone's punch line.

Still, in the midst of the lightened atmosphere someone sounded in agreement.

"Insignificant as it is, I want to save her. I want to remain as we are now. People would have their own conflicts with the Testament Union, but if they did not... Everyone would think that way."

"I see, definitely," responded Heidi, forming a smile.

Then she continued, with a "well then" as a preface:

"Shall we ascertain what we do not know at this moment?"

In a dark room, a single figure rose up.

It was Masazumi, black-haired and in white clothes.

Without her outer uniform and trousers, wearing nothing other than her underwear and the short-sleeved shirt that is her inner uniform, she pulled down her blanket to her hips and drew a breath. The words that spilled from her mouth to her chest were...

“Sleepy...”

Murmuring, Masazumi looked around her surroundings with eyes that did not focus on anything.

The room was spacious. It was a reception area, with sofas surrounding a table. With curtains blocking light from the windows, the pictures on the walls, the carpets on the floor, the bookshelves lined up; everything had a darkened color to them.

Masazumi wiped her face with her sleeve without thinking. The fabric absorbed moisture from the corner of her eye to the area on her cheek.

“Did I see a dream again?”

She said in a small voice, rubbing her eyes.

“From when Mother disappeared...”

Before she could finish, she put strength in her eyebrows and eyelids.

“...Nnn.”

Nodding, she opened her eyes and rose straight up at the same time.

Looking around her surroundings, her gaze fell on the books on the sofas and table.

...This is.

The record of the negotiations with the Testament Union that took place in the outer Provisional Council’s building from last night. Masazumi never entered the meeting room, but the secretary from her father’s group did her the favor of forwarding the decisions the meeting made to her. Various ideas were exchanged and confirmed, and before it was over the night had passed.

After her father’s group left to meet up and open the general meeting, the secretaries also went off somewhere; so Masazumi returned to her home.

Then Masazumi glanced at the single piece of memo placed on those documents.

It contained the conclusions she made herself dealing with the present case after reaching home last night. The contents were...

“...The Method to Save Horizon.”

She remembered writing while thinking it was impossible, then wiped it off right after she finished.

To face the pressure of the Testament Union, the possible ways to refute and counter, and then to convey to other countries that righteousness is, at the very least, on our side.

Still...

“It’s impossible after all.”

She was part of the Provisional Council, which holds the Testament Union’s view; and she was inexperienced. *Ideas are useless without talent*, she thought.

That was why Masazumi turned her gaze away from the memo and looked at the clock. It was 10 AM. She would have been late on a normal day, but she hadn’t slept more than three hours. Furthermore...

...Do not go to the Academy, huh.

Right now, out of all the Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council she was the only one retaining her authority. This was part of her father’s group’s plan to keep a grasp on the Academy’s rights. In other words...

...I am just being a convenient piece.

Things moved at a rapid pace after Mikawa’s destruction last night. Musashi had a three-part constitutional government, consisting of the Academy, the Provisional Council and the King; but the strong point here was the link between the King and the Council. Under this state of emergency, if the King and Council were to withhold the rights of the Academy negotiations would be able to proceed at a fast pace and decisions made without including any inexperienced opinion; that is what they likely concluded.

From her viewpoint, it was just a coup d’etat by the King and Provisional Council on the Academy. But...

“...If that is the best for Musashi as it is now, there’s plenty of merit in abiding by it.”

Drawing a breath, Masazumi stood up from the sofa.

She lightly stretched her body, then drew another.

Picking up the pillow that fell from the sofa and placing it on the blanket, she looked at her uniform set on the opposite sofa.

She must have been tired this morning. The sleeves weren't even ordered.

"But still, it doesn't seem like Father will come back home..."

Even if he did, I don't think he'll get mad looking at this situation. He'll most likely keep being indifferent. This thought strongly existed in her mind.

"Anyway, breakfast."

Masazumi headed towards the corridor. This house had an indoor bath, a rarity on Musashi. It would have been a waste, but she wanted to clean her body and wash off the sweat from sleeping.

She was free until the afternoon as long as she did not go near the Academy. To have breakfast under that condition...

...The store where P-01s – Horizon – used to be, huh.

She would probably need to tell the shopkeeper about her story last night.

...What will happen, I wonder.

She couldn't do anything last night.

Even when she was being taken away, even when she left having realized her own existence.

"No... I wasn't unable to do anything."

"I didn't do anything," Masazumi murmured. In her head, she remembered a single movement.

It was that of the boy running over, the one who tried to do something even though he couldn't do anything.

Compared to him, I wonder what I am.

My idleness was because I was thinking about Musashi's position.

Was that what my mistake was? Masazumi thought as she entered the corridor. Before she realized it, her gaze was on the memo she wrote lying on

the table.

“Is everyone trying to save Horizon, I wonder...”

Proceedings were advancing in the classroom.

Heidi was leading the meeting, as expected. While placing her white fox Mouse, Erimaki, on her head...

“Then, first of all, let us ascertain the intentions of those who are not attending.”

She displayed the records of incoming divine mail to Erimaki, while making sure no one else saw the contents.

“Let’s see~ then~, hm, hmm, right now Azuma-kun and Miriam are being guarded by the bodyguard team and cannot leave the dorm. It doesn’t look like we’ll be able to visit her place as well today. Also, wasn’t that ghost-like girl in Azuma-kun’s care? Let’s discuss that with the police when we have the chance.”

“Ah,” Urquiaga responded. He looked up at the ceiling for a moment.

“From what I see, she was quite attached to Azuma. I don’t know why they were stuck together inside the Academy; but she’s still a child, ghost or not. With someone who can pose no harm, nothing bad should happen so long as she does not separate from Azuma. He himself probably possesses a strong spiritual aspect being a half-god, so I don’t think it will affect him either.”

As if to warn, everyone nodded to his words.

“Well, from a moral standpoint, Azuma is not a lolicon like Ohiroshiki so it should be alright.”

“You got it wrong...!”

Ohiroshiki stood up from slightly farther back into the classroom while wiping his forehead with a towel.

“I am not a lolicon! My belief is one that belongs to the major ‘life worship’ that is described in the Testament and recreated in Europe, one that values the life force of the young!”

Ohiroshiki held his right arm out.

“...It is a crime to touch for lolicons; but for life-worshippers touching is a supreme deed equivalent to being in contact with God!”

“Right, right,” Heidi nodded.

“Would it be supreme for you to stay put while in school? Ah, if you get caught we don’t know each other, alright?”

“Hmm? Did I not explain it properly?”

Everyone ignored Ohiroshiki and looked in Heidi’s direction. As for Heidi, skillfully caressing below Erimaki’s neck above her head...

“Then, for the others, first is Seijun; but in reality she is the only one whose rights as vice president have not been taken away. Right now, Seijun is the sole person among the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers still possessing authority.”

“Masazumi-dono’s father is a member of the Provisional Council after all.”

Holding his arms together and lightly sitting on his seat, Tenzou continued.

“From the Provisional Council’s perspective, letting the compliant Masazumi-dono retain her position as if to represent the Student Council would make things easier in the future.”

“Yes, and you know? Because Seijun still has her rights we can’t hold a special general student meeting. If we were to hold one, the result would give us temporary authority; but school regulations dictate that everyone with such authority must be absent due to circumstances like war before we can hold such a meeting.”

“By retaining Masazumi’s position with her and having her on their side, the Provisional Council is not letting us have the special general student meeting, then.”

Hmm. Everyone fell into thinking.

Then, from Heidi’s head, the white fox Erimaki clapped and brought up a signframe.

“Enemy?”

“Ah, h-hey, Erimaki, don’t say that.”

“But it does feel that way, from a positional aspect. They’re the ‘ones on the other side’ after all.”

Neshinbara spoke, accompanied by a long breath. He called out a civil official Mouse, and retrieved some data via signframe.

“Making enemies out of them would be serious trouble, you know? Honda-kun’s oration talents cannot be taken lightly. She had over 70% of the votes during the Student Council election, and the problem we’re facing is of a political nature. If something does happen that causes us to face off with Honda-kun, besting her would be a difficult act indeed.”

“Besides,” he continued:

“Just like her, Mitotsudaira-kun and Naomasa-kun are not here.”

“Yes,” Asama nodded. She looked at the Divine Mail reception log Hanami brought out.

“Masa is in Musashino’s central engine room meeting with the Engineering Club. Mito is, as expected, attending the feudal lord meeting of the landowners of the ship on Musashino as the student representative. But, the trouble with Mito is...”

Asama made eye contact with Heidi. As both nodded, Heidi shrugged her shoulders.

“If Horizon were to commit suicide, the Matsudaira family would disappear and Musashi’s residents would be transferred to the Far East settlement in Edo. If this happens, the temporarily succeeding Mito branch of the Matsudaira family will become the head family. In other words...the Mitotsudaira family will become the representative of the Testament Union-ruled Far East, as our lord.”

At those words, everyone looked at each other. Then everyone started whispering to each other...

“Long ago, as her name Mitotsudaira Nate was shortened to Mito Nate, she was made fun of by being called Mito Natto, right?”

“Well that was because she herself slipped up in shortening her name ‘Nate’ and wrote down something like ‘Nato’, no?”

“Oh, hell no. What if she still has a grudge from that time... She’ll definitely get a straw roll that looks like natto and have us do the Mino dance.”

“I wonder why everyone can suspect their own classmate, I wonder?”

Everyone’s whispers stopped at Heidi’s words.

“Disregarding that,” Heidi prefaced as she looked slightly up towards the ceiling along with the white fox on her head.

“Well, I think that we’re most likely going to have to talk to her about this. After all, after the Testament Union’s dispatch, Mito bought a plot of land and came here as a means of becoming a Far East citizen. Still, she retains her status as a knight; thus...”

“As one of the few in Musashi, she has permission to possess a weapon. And she’ll become quite the force when she uses it.”

Hmm, thus everyone held their arms together.

“Long ago, she was super hostile and scary for some time, right? Now...just by how many times more can she be?”

“She’d be great as an ally, but if we are to fight her it’ll be all kinds of impossible.”

“Ah, I shouldn’t have called her Natto and stuff after all...”

“...As I said, why is everyone talking about all these guilty things?”

Heidi drew a breath.

“Well, let’s do our best to make her our ally. Then, um...”

Heidi turned to face Shirojiro who was on her side.

“Shiro-kun, is it fine now?”

Heidi faced Shirojiro, who was closing his work signframe, and stated:

“You know? ...This is what I think the situation is. Musashi and Horizon are in

a pinch, and with our authority taken we don't seem to have a proper role. To abide by the Testament Union means voluntarily turning the Far East over to their control; but to oppose them will mean the crisis of all-out war with them."

To Heidi's call, Shirojiro sighed.

"Then, what do you want me to do?"

"Judge; from a businessman's viewpoint, I'd like to hear the financial aspects of this situation, or something."

"Even if you say that, I'm not that interested in that that much. I am busy at work after all."

"You know, Shiro-kun? See, I think that this is a big business chance."

Immediately after hearing that, Shirojiro straightened up his posture. Erimaki raised its legs and formed a signframe "Profit Meter" on Shirojiro's head, filling five gauges in a second, with more coming in.

"Big business chance, is it! Hm, that sounds good! Money! Money, is it! Right, I've cleared my thoughts! Listen well, you bastards!"

Shirojiro, for some reason, stood facing towards the teacher's desk and said: "...I will now talk about money, which I love!"

"You're the worst!"

In response to everyone's punchline, Shirojiro turned around. Furthermore...

"Quieten down, my clients. See, I don't always talk about money, but this is a conversation about money. It may not be, but I'll make it such that it is. Understood?"

He made it clear what he is about to say. And then...

"Now, we are bargaining with the Testament Union for the safety of ourselves with our monarch Horizon's life as well as Musashi on the line. That is our situation in my opinion."

"See here," Shirojiro said again.

"There is something we call 'ransom', a way in which things are settled with

possessions like money or land, practiced in Europe. It happens quite often, say to have war prisoners returned or to compensate for a king or country's mistakes. But in the Far East, there is a tendency to offer to throw one's life away as a means of settlement, because of the shame. In that, we can think of this as the characteristic Far Eastern 'life considerate financial economics'. Thus..."

He drew a breath.

"To the Far East, there is merit in loading an entire country's responsibility onto its ruler's life. By the cutting of his neck or stomach, his subordinates and people are guaranteed to be safe."

In other words...

"The value of a monarch's life in money is virtually similar to that of ownership of the country. Additionally, by 'paying' the other side with the monarch's life, authority over the country can quickly be transferred and the safety and status of its people can be guaranteed. How the Far East is run, *i.e.* how it belongs to the emperor but management is left for the lords to handle, may have also played a part in giving rise to this process."

Well then.

"For a monarch to pay with his life, a condition must be met. This is either, **1: At the end of a war, to guarantee the safety of the losing country.**

2: After an irreparable mistake he made, to not burden the country with his responsibility.

3: Mood.

This is how it mostly is. Though considering things like coup d'états as similar to 1 is glossing over a lot.

The reason many lords with little influence commit suicide is because they were so easily defeated in wars that would lead to 1. For 2 it's usually because of the weak influence of the monarch, where payment by land is not possible."

"Which one are we in now?"

In response to Heidi's question, Shirojiro stated:

“The second one. The Far East neither invaded nor were they themselves attacked; but we did cause the loss of Mikawa, a land of importance to other countries. Moreover, Horizon holds a Logismoí Óplo which she cannot legally possess. Thus, by offering herself they will not be able to make efforts to put the blame on the Far East, and our safety will have to be guaranteed.”

“But,” Shirojiro continued.

“Mikawa was meant to fall in the first place. Even the outskirts and the bay, sooner or later they will be destroyed and swallowed up by the sea. It would just be that this method of destruction of Mikawa would not be beneficial to the Historical Recreation of the Testament.

“That is why after substituting Musashi for Mikawa we will move over to another Matsudaira territory in Edo. Then, we will return back to ‘Musashi’ as it is.”

Still, someone raised his voice. It was Tenzou, saying as he tilted his neck: “Even if you say that, they cannot just suddenly alter the Edo settlement to accommodate us on such short notice.

“Lord Motonobu, along with IZUMO, has developed Edo specifically into a particular historical excavation site; but people are still leaving the place. We’ll have to find new places if that place is not big enough for all of Musashi’s residents, and there’s the problem with dealing with all the overwritten lands as well...”

“As well?”

As Shirojiro urged him on, Tenzou thought for a bit. Then, shrugging his shoulders...

“We’ll have to accommodate nearly a hundred thousand people, but... Where will we get the money to cover the expenses, considering the Musashi-Mikawa modification costs as well? For a population of 100,000 and an average of 5 per house, 20,000 houses would be needed. Also, until then...”

Tenzou brought out something covered in cloth. Held in his hand was...

“This is a camping tent complete with the essentials; a two-person version will cost up to 20,000 yen. For a 100,000 population to hold out while waiting for

proper housing to be built, 50,000 of those will be needed... 1,000,000,000 yen. Other than that, we'll have to set up water systems and toilets as well as a supply of food. How are we going to pay for those?"

"A source of income, is what you're asking, right?"

Shirojiro stated, affirming with Tenzou.

"The people on the net are already in a panic as we speak. I'll tell you what I know about that later. Right now, the Testament Union possesses a very large sum of money. You'll do best to understand what I mean by that."

That's why...

"The Union is raring to do this; and for us on the other side, there will be lots of problems."

"Heh heh heh. Miser, women will bomb all those problems as they come, you know?"

"You'll explode, Aoi Sister. See here? The Testament Union is raring for this. They're eager to become our enemy."

But as a preface, Shirojiro said:

"...Now then, if we were to become enemies, let me tell you what will happen."

"If," Shirojiro stated.

To his side, a map of the Far East was displayed indicating the foreign settlements in each country.

"If the Testament Union were to become our enemy, Musashi will not be able to resupply at any of the Far Eastern foreign settlements that would become our ports. Do you know what this means?"

"...We won't be able to trade? Is that it?"

Shirojiro closed his eyes at Heidi's words.

"Almost correct. See here? Musashi's most important trading item is food. Indeed, Musashi is a city that grows only 10% of its food, relying on importation

for the rest. In other words, if they refuse to trade with us we will be in a hopeless situation.”

“...Hey, does Musashi not grow its own crops on the ship?”

It was not Shirojiro who answered the question Adele posed. Ohiroshiki did.

He stood up, wiping his sweat off with a towel.

“It’s impossible. I am part of the Cooking Club, and I know the people of the Agriculture Club caring for those plantations; so...”

Ohiroshiki called out a human-type Mouse draped in shrine maiden clothes from his pendant.

“Gu...she’s cute after all. Her design was done quite well, don’t you think?”

“Whatever, just talk! Are you falling for your Mouse as well?”

“Gu...!” Ohiroshiki grumbled, but later recovered after his Mouse calmed him down. As she produced a number of sign frames and graphs with the brush in her hand...

“It is hard to grow crops by hydroponics on Musashi, so wheat is grown in soil. According to the Testament, in this era the average European would consume over 600 grams of food per day including their staple, bread. In that case, for Dinkel wheat which yields an average of 20 grains per head, about 20 ares will be needed to feed one person for a year. That’s a 20 by 100 meter area.”

“Do we really need that much land!?”

“Well, this is where the Testament’s interpretation comes in.”

Ohiroshiki held his arms as if to hold the air, then suddenly crashed it.

“If we were to compare the land of the Far East with that of the whole Earth, we’ll find that the Far East is $\frac{1}{394}$ the size of the Earth; so the Testament makes up for that by amplifying whatever we could harvest from our land by 394 times. Considering that, the agricultural land that will be needed to feed one person with staple food for a year will shorten down to five square meters. That would be three tatami mats, or four if you count the ridges, in Far East terms. The Far East has a climate adjusted to grow rice, so it’s not that suitable to start planting wheat here; but a lot of other countries have wheat as their

staple food. In that case, the overwritten lands that hold the suitable climate to grow wheat will become important for practical use, thus giving rise to this interpretation.”

Everyone began to use their sign frames and fingers to calculate the area, as well as look outside into the school area to imagine how big the area mentioned would be. In that situation, Kimi paused her hands which were still cutting out the magazine and looked around.

“Oh? Are you not done yet?”

“T-this woman is the worst! And she’s more than ten years old! What a hag...”

“Ah!” Ohiroshiki exclaimed. Receiving cold smiles from all the women in his class, he hung his head.

After a while, with his Mouse tapping on his shoulder, he resumed.

“...Well, you know, the agriculture may be condensed but Musashi still has a hundred thousand people. Thus, even with four tatami mats per person we’ll need 400,000 mats.”

How quick, everyone said, holding their heads.

Adele put out a calculation signframe in a hurry.

“Then, for 400,000 mats, umm, the standard underground residential block’s two-person room would have four mats, so the area...”

“The area would be 660,000 square meters.”

Seeming to have done such calculations in the past, Ohiroshiki answered without looking at anything. Then...

“The standard hull of Musashi is no more than 1040 meters long and 144 meters wide per ship. Even if you dedicate a whole level into agriculture, you’ll get only about 155,000 square meters. We will require 4.3 levels for agriculture to sustain us.

“For a semiannual crop we’ll need over two levels. For a three-harvest crop, 1.5, but food isn’t just limited to staples. If we consider livestock and vegetables, there is no way we can increase the size of the animals; and it’ll be hard to cultivate vegetables in a dense manner. Particularly, to feed one person

with enough livestock we'll need more than two times the size of the area of wheat as pasture, and we can't harvest animals more than once per year.

"Moreover, considering the storage of water needed for the crops, storehouses for the harvests and storage for the livestock feed... The Cooking Club's trial calculation came to a requirement of nearly 20 levels, but the only ships on Musashi long enough and with enough levels are the third left and right ships with 15 levels each. Devoting one of them completely to agriculture won't be enough; and from a personnel aspect, getting new people onto the Musashi for the sole purpose of the agricultural industry is impossible. We're essentially establishing a new outer town for the sake of supporting the 100,000 people in our own.

"The present agricultural sector here is focusing on developing improved crops for trade, so we can't just use it for something else."

I see, everyone murmured. Adele, who had asked that question, dropped her shoulders.

"I feel like I lost to Ohiroshiki-san for some reason today..."

That moment, everyone affirmed and followed through with her.

"...Don't mind it. No one would have thought that man would be in the Cooking Club rather than the Eroge Research Association."

"Continuously calling out to little girls while hiding such a weapon in him..."

"Someone please put him in his place."

"W-why are you all so harsh with me!?"

"Hmm, no one would hold back against a stranger with a fault, right, everyone?"

"So long as money is not involved," affirmed Shirojiro. Gesturing thanks to the seated Ohiroshiki with one hand, he continued.

"Musashi's emergency reserves will only last two weeks. We'll eventually run out if we try to escape, and any negotiation that may lead to trade will be clearly visible."

"T-then..."

Adele leaned back her body and looked to the ceiling.

“In the end, we’ll eventually be out if we were to oppose the Testament Union.”

Haa. To those words mixed with a sigh, there was a word, ‘but’, in response.

“Oh my, is that so?”

It was Kimi, turning her body. Continuing to cut out the questionnaire corner with the scissors, she said without looking at anyone: “You guys, you are not an unorganized mob, so do pull yourselves together for my sake. ...The miser over there, stop being mean and tell us... What do we do?”

“I see that the key thing to do is simple. ...We oppose the Testament Union, while protecting other Far Eastern settlements in each country and reserving our right to trade.”

“Just like that, huh!!”

Everyone slipped in the punch line. Then Adele...

“...Uh, can we do something that convenient?”

“I told you, no? I cannot give a conclusion from any viewpoint other than that of a businessman, but I can say stuff from a businessman’s standpoint. Everyone else should be the same; each of us has our own unique set of knowledge, skills and strengths, and the force that assembles these together and utilizes them... That’s what we call government.”

“Thus,” he said, looking out the window. His gaze led to the southern sky. On the other side of the sky, where a red light went up to the heavens from the Ley Lines every now and then, there is a land port. With his gaze remaining in that direction.

“There is only one method: that is to bring the one affiliated with the Provisional Council, Honda Masazumi, over to our side. Being associated with that group, she should understand the arrangements of the Testament Union. That is why, to refute the legalities of the opponent... We’ll wait until the moment we have the right to oppose them.”

“S-Shiro-kun...that scene just now may be quite cool!”

“...Hmph, do it properly and we will profit! It should not fail! The publicity resulting from opposing the Testament Union is the best! They are the ones publicizing all of this on their own after all!”

You are too honest with yourselves, everyone said, looking down at them as Heidi asked Shirojiro a question.

“Shiro-kun, but... Is there a way to get Seijun over to our side?”

“There is. But, before that...”

Shirojiro turned around and pointed to the back of the class with his chin.

The chair furthest back, by the window. Over there was...

“Toori-kun...”

His figure, in its uniform adorned with chains slumped over the desk on which the sun shone brightly, was still not moving.

“Even with rights or whatever; ...If this idiot of a chancellor and president brings us down we won’t be able to do anything.”

At Shirojiro’s words, everyone brought about a deep atmosphere of silence.

What do we do? Everyone’s eyes met. *What should we do?* they inquired without a sound.

At that moment...

“...Right, I hope you’re not thinking of anything dangerous!”

A woman’s voice came from the corridor.

Taken aback, everyone turned to look at the door. Standing there was a female teacher, her figure dressed in a jersey.

Everyone looked at her.

“Oriotorai-sensei...!?”

Oriotorai showed a smile to Shirojiro, who retreated from in front of the teacher’s desk.

“Well, there is a lot to think about isn’t there? For now, we’re doing class

work in homeroom.”

Then Oriotorai brought out a pile of paper from the latch on her hip and placed it on the teacher’s desk. Resounding their weight as they were placed there, those paper copies were...

“Manuscript paper. ...For this morning, I’ll have you write an essay.”

“...Essay?”

“Yep, you have one and a half hours. For the rest of the time, I plan to have one of you read out their work.”

Oriotorai did not mind the ‘Geh’ sounds everyone made, showing a grin.

“The title will be ‘What I Want to Do’. Right now, everyone is thinking only about what we should do, right? While it may cool your heads, this exercise is important as well. And now, before anything...”

Oriotorai went over to the staff-use table and switched on the monitor on the shelf. A torii-type signframe appeared; before an image could clear up the static on the monitor, she looked at everybody.

Towards everyone, who wondered what she wanted to show them, Oriotorai remained smiling.

“I’m sure everyone is thinking about ‘What I Want to Do’ right now. Just for a bit, this will become a hint from a recent-development aspect, I think. So watch carefully. Look at the result.”

An image projected.

It was the scene atop a hill, where people wearing three different kinds of uniforms lined up.

“K.P.A. Italia, Tres España, as well as the Far East Defense Unit that arrived from Mikawa. These three forces are meeting each other to exchange information. ...This broadcast is aiming to depict the Testament Union as friendly to the residents of Musashi and Mikawa.”

“But,” she said.

“In this meeting, there will be something Tres España will return to the Far

East.”

“...What would that be?”

“The Divine Weapon, ‘Tonbokiri’.”

Oriotorai’s smile became something that remained only at the tip of her mouth.

“Now what will happen, I wonder. The one that will receive it is Lord Tadakatsu’s daughter, Honda Futayo. What the arguably unparalleled female warrior in the Far East will do, and what will happen; watch it with your eyes, and start thinking.”

A moment.

“About ‘What I Want to Do’ right now.”

Chapter 24: The Determined on the Plains

CHAPTER 24

"The Determined on the Plains"



To walk this path is to pass a difficult mountain trail
To not walk this path is to be left standing.
The only way we can move on is upwards, then...

Point Allocation (Decision)

To walk this path is to pass a difficult mountain trail

To not walk this path is to be left standing

The only way we can move on is upwards, then

Point Allocation (Decision)

There was a land spread out with sand. Facing the ocean, the land was vast and flat, with good drainage.

On its surface, ten ships of gargantuan size were lined up. As all of them were fixed on the ground by anchoring ropes and landing structures, the shadow they cast fell over the surface of the land.

People were moving inside the ship.

They were mobilizing to carry out the duties of transport and security.

Both the people in security and those who were carrying ship-to-ship cargo in and out looked in the northern and eastern directions every so often.

In the east, there was a town held between two small hills. However, there was neither the smoke of cooking rising up, the sound of activity in the mills, nor were the sight of people present in that town.

Everyone extended their gaze to beyond the town.

Over there was a bay. A large bay near the ocean, where many waves were.

The bay was a great distance from the hill, the town, the rural parts and the waterways; but because it was so big one could think that they would be able to reach for it if they held out their hand.

The bay was ruined.

The curtain of white that adorned its appearance was surged into the air by the brown-colored and water-colored filth below it.

Sometimes, as if to jump out of the surface of the water, remains of the houses showed themselves. Then, as if to display themselves to the land, they swayed for a few moments; and then sank yet again.

On the shores of the bay, a number of towns and villages were still being destroyed and sunk by the bay.

Still, this was not the reason there were times when everyone would look towards the east at the same time. The reason was...

“——”

The light. Every so often, there would be a line of red light shining from the surface of the sea reaching towards the sky. Sometimes there would be only one light, sometimes there would be many at once; sometimes they would shoot up straight to the heavens, then scatter and disappear, and sometimes they would appear to be drawing a curve heading for the northern and western sky.

They would be accompanied by the shaking of the ground. It shook aimlessly, as if staggering.

As the ground calmed down, the light in the sky would disappear and the towns and villages devoured by the bay would again disappear with a splash.

And then everyone would start moving again, while looking in a different direction.

North.

Facing the vast land port was a land untouched.

It was a hill where the woods, rivers, and grasslands remained.

Still, ships were present at both the top of the short hill and in its opposite direction.

There were ten ships. On the elongated structure of the ship meant for transport, smoke from cooking was rising; and a great number of people were standing on its deck.

They were looking towards the top of the hill.

On the top of the green hill, on plain land, groups of people were present.

There were three of them. One had a red western-style uniform. Another had black western-style uniforms. The last had a black eastern-style uniform.

People looked on. The group in red and the two in black were facing each other in one line each as if to form a triangle, and people in each position were exchanging documents and containers between themselves. The people continued their work, pausing in between to look on.

Inside the group of red standing on top of the hill where the wind blows, a girl clad in mechanical arms stood at the leftmost point.

She held a single spear covered in cloth in her arms.

Towards the girl with the spear with the words “Tonbokiri” engraved on its hilt, the young man next to her spoke out.

“I’ve been standing all this while, but is there a reason for me to be here, Gin-san?”

“You look good enough just standing there; so isn’t it fine, Master Muneshige? I always get nervous when I am on merchandise transfer duty. Indeed, I’m just being silent to not blow my cover.”

“...Gin-san, are there times when you get nervous?”

“Tes, though as a daughter of a warrior family displaying such emotions on my face would be shameful so I usually keep them hidden. ...Shall I show them to you next time, Master Muneshige? Though you’ll probably think of me as a troublesome woman if I do.”

“I’m sorry.”

Muneshige stated in a small voice looking at the fleet commands exchanging their mobilization schedules for over the next few days.

“You do tense up when I hug you all the time, Gin-san, no? Though you loosen up quite a bit right after.”

Gin lowered her gaze to the ground, biting her lips. She stole a glance towards Muneshige on her side, but he appeared to be looking at the sky with a face that feigned ignorance. As Gin returned her gaze...

“...Is this revenge for the time when you woke up?”

“...No, it was just a reasonable direction of the flow of our conversation.”

“Tes, then I’ll deal with that after, so do prepare yourself. ...You won’t escape if you tried with your legs in that condition, after all.”

Thus, Gin looked forward.

...Now, it would be great if we can finish this safely.

The one at the end of Gin’s gaze, thinking as such, was a row of people dressed in black Eastern-style uniforms. The Far East uniform. They were the members of the ship escorting Musashi, here to represent the Guard Unit. They should have not been here as those in agreement by nature, but...

...It is so that K.P.A. Italia can display its understanding towards the Far East, huh.

There was very little recognition by Musashi towards Horizon Ariadust and her position as the present head of Mikawa. However, even if that was not the case, there would still be very few among Musashi’s residents that would oppose the ruling of her suicide.

However, if the fact that students of the Far East present at this scene as members of the Testament Union were to be shown to the people on Musashi, there would be a different meaning. Moreover, if those students were of the Guard Unit...

...It would mean that those with power have agreed to this ruling.

Musashi’s residents never had the strength to resist from the beginning. For those who were planning to oppose the Testament Union under the pretense that the Guard Unit would carry out its duty to “protect” them, this would have weakened their resolve and replaced it with resignation to defeat.

It was a simple method, but nevertheless the one they had to choose under the limiting conditions; thus Gin thought.

Whatever the case, Gin thought. She looked towards the Far Eastern woman in front of her.

She stood upright, hair tied behind her head. Possessing two blades on her

hip, she looked straight in Gin's direction.

It was the first time she had met her.

However, she had already known her name.

...Honda Futayo.

The daughter of Honda Tadakatsu, who would be the one to succeed him eventually, thus it was said.

Gin noticed Futayo's line of sight directed towards the spear, Tonbokiri, held in her mechanical arms. It was the one her father left in her care. It was probably the only thing she could hold her gaze on.

Gin wondered if the one on the other side knew who she was. No, whether she did nor didn't, it wouldn't matter; she was not her ally. ...There was no need to change their relation, was there?

Now, which side is she on, Gin thought.

Born into a warrior family with political influence, Gin could understand three things.

Understanding her role as a part of the family, she was a woman who would cause the family's collapse with her death.

Understanding her role as a support for her husband, she was a woman who would feel her worth in life in her husband's success.

...And the last one was...

Understanding the very order of her family, she was a woman who would feel her worth in life in her own success.

Gin was thinking about her second role. She wondered what would be the case for the other party.

"Third Special Duty."

An order came from the fleet commander acting as the chief of the dispatch team, addressed to her.

Thus Gin affirmed and, retaining her gaze on Futayo...

“From the one affiliated with the New Nagoya Castle based in Mikawa, the Far East, as its Special First Reserve Agent, Honda Tadakatsu-sama; this is the item left in the custody of the Special Third-year with the same affiliation, Honda Futayo.”

With a greeting, she took one step forward. Then, continuing to step on the soil and the grass, the second and third steps.

At the midpoint between the two sides where her footsteps stopped, Honda Futayo gave her greetings.

That should have been the case.

Standing on a position five meters before the midpoint, the first to come was a voice.

As Futayo turned her gaze away from Tonbokiri to face the other party...

“...How?”

Gin immediately replied to her question.

“I have been told about a lot of things.”

“So that is the case,” Futayo answered, giving her greetings. Then, facing this side and taking a step...

“__ __”

The next moment, she felt a hand within reaching distance in front of her.

...This is-!?

Shortening the distance between them, it was a movement-type spell.

Gin looked at the figure of the person standing in front of her.

Futayo was displaying an act of dignity by using her movement-type spell here.

...I'll use the spell in a manner that can be clearly seen, and obtain Tonbokiri which Tachibana Gin holds with my own hands.

That way...

...I can show that there are still opportunities for the Far East to obtain power and weaponry.

Right now, via K.P.A. Italia's broadcasting members this scene should reach everyone; whether the refugees of Mikawa, Musashi's residents, or those living in the other countries.

That is why she moved right then.

There had been a secret meeting between the higher positions of the Guard Unit that morning. She understood the provocation she would make with this action. She also knew that, by the perceived continuation of the Honda family's support of last night's incident, she would propel the already critical position of the Far East further into danger.

Still, if she were to do nothing here...

...There will be no more chances.

With little other power than to protect themselves, Musashi's people are having most of their will to fight taken away. *Furthermore, we as the Guard Unit of the Far East, in carrying out our duty of protection, are entrusting that very duty towards the people of Musashi to the Testament Union.* And finally, there has been word that the rights of most of the Chancellor's Officers and Student Council on the Musashi are being withheld under the care of its king, and that the Provisional Council is taking the side of the Testament Union. At this rate...

...We will no longer be able to avoid having our independence and power taken away, left with nothing else but resignation to our fate.

Furthermore, to accept this very fate...

...Will mean to lose the one that has become the head of Mikawa, Horizon Ariadust-sama.

A monarch paying with his life for a country in danger would mean that all the efforts to save it would be in vain. Thus his followers, putting faith in their lord, would bring out their full force to avoid such a situation.

Nonetheless, these were the words spoken in the meeting:

...Our lord is scattering her life away without us doing anything.

She knew the reason why; *we did not have any power to do anything.*

But, everyone continued in the meeting:

...What would happen if we were to do something?

They were the only people in a position with a little power among a nation that had none.

A small action would be enough. If she were to show at least the intention of doing something, those with something planned could use it as a foundation for their determination; and...

...If there is hope, there will have been meaning in her action.

The one who took action was the person in command. If a subordinate did it, there would not be any other choice but to deal with him under the strict and controlling directions of the Testament Union; but because the chief herself did it, nothing like that would happen. The one in trouble would be the Union, having lost their control; so there would be a degree to which acts like that would be permitted. If her thinking was found to be naive, she would still have shown her resolve. It would just be passed off as her losing her mind looking at her father's rival.

Her action would end at successfully obtaining her weapon. Everything would be decided at that point.

That was why Futayo moved.

The spell she used was the IZUMO-aligned Kazamatsuri movement-type spell, "Soaring Wings". Treating any resistance to her movement as an impurity and purifying it, ultimately one can purify his own body weight and, through this spell, one can bring his own strength to the utmost limit. The offering is, while carrying around a weapon that Kazamatsuri permits without ever drawing it out, he must move successively as to display the movement of the wind and follow its direction.

It was still like that now. Carrying a sword on her side, she moved forward in such a way as to link her movements together.

"__"

And reached to take Tonbokiri from Tachibana Gin, who stood in front of her.

For a distance as short as fifty meters, it would have been next to impossible to perceive her movements.

Still, Futayo did not let her guard down. Futayo sped up with all her might. Her start was a bit slow so as not to display her intention to the other party, but after that it would only take a moment.

She moved, then, hearing the gasps of the people who realized her actions.

“...!?”

But Futayo looked.

Soaring forward earlier, the one in front of her was not holding her father’s spear in mechanical arms.

“This is...”

A figure cutting in between herself and Gin accompanied by a breeze...

“...Tachibana Muneshige!”

The next moment, Futayo saw a light accompanied by sound.

The sound was a cold echo, like the breaking of glass. The light was the blue glow of ether. Those were the aftereffects of the voiding of a spell, caused by the breaking of ether.

...Damn it.

Not being able to continue the movement of the wind after having her body abruptly stopped, Futayo’s “Soaring Wings” spell was destroyed.

Then Futayo understood; her own speed was overturned by her opponent.

Gin heard a statement from the figure of Muneshige in front of her eyes.

“...Well then, I’ll have Tonbokiri returned by myself.”

She couldn’t see Futayo on the other side of Muneshige.

But she could sense the light and sound of the spell nullifying. That is...

...The Musashi Guard Unit was, in this place, displaying the Far East's will to resist.

She could also see the meaning behind the action as an act of retaining the Far East's pride.

By using a surprise attack with her speed, she was not clearly resisting but merely showing the intention to do so.

It was a good method. Without the Pope Chancellor here, there was no one in the vicinity that could pass on an immediate judgement.

Furthermore, Muneshige was involved in the fight from last night; now was the right time to act.

Still...

...It was laid to waste by Master Muneshige.

Master Muneshige's movement-type spell was superior to that of Futayo.

In contrast to Futayo's approach from straight across the distance, Muneshige took a roundabout path to arrive in front of this side. He arrived earlier than Futayo.

Muneshige was faster. Then...

"Third Special Duty, the Divine Weapon, Tonbokiri."

Thus he said, turning his face to meet Gin's gaze.

It was a smiling face, but Muneshige would have a gentle expression on a normal day. He won't show any expression other than that of a smile.

Then, what about his legs? He walked and ran as if he could, but didn't consider anything more than that.

Despite that, why would he use his spell here? They could have used the act to further impose on the Far East if he didn't.

She understood the reason.

...For me...

Shame had a higher priority than injury. He moved so that she did not lose her

face.

Damn it, Gin thought. She had let her guard down. For her, one of whose principles was to devote herself to him, this was a failure.

That was why Gin pondered. As compensation and gratitude for her fault, what would she do to follow through with Muneshige's course of action.

That is.

"Master Muneshige. Here."

As if merely a matter-of-fact, she passed Tonbokiri on to Muneshige. Pretending not to notice the spells he and Futayo had used, she left the spear in the care of the man who survived last night's battle.

"Right," Muneshige affirmed. He received Tonbokiri and turned his back.

He straightened his posture and, raising Tonbokiri towards the sky with both his hands...

"The Divine Weapon I am holding here, which Honda Tadakatsu left in our care from last night; the spear – Tonbokiri – I shall now return to his daughter, Honda Futayo...!"

With this everything is settled, Gin concluded while thinking that he's being nonsensical again, to one side.

Among the only group permitted to have power in the Far East, with the position of the Guard Unit; even the strongest of them, Honda Futayo, could not win against Muneshige in terms of power. Thus it was displayed.

Furthermore, it was not she who had obtained the weapon her father had left to her by herself.

...She only obtained it because it was left in our care, then returned to her...

The people who saw her act would surely understand that their action did not pass through to us.

And they should have seen how we didn't even react to the trifle that is the light and sound of the spell failing.

Futayo's side was trying to display their intention to resist, but all of that has

backfired.

It couldn't be thought as a rash act. The information about his injury would have been known.

In the chaos of last night, she took him under her arms and retreated using the shortest route. There were many witnesses, and they did not have anything to hide.

The Far East would have thought that he could no longer move.

But...

...Master Muneshige was being reckless after all.

His course of action was to not only hide his wounds, but to show that he has in fact recovered from his injury and is able to move again.

He had not recovered fully. He should have felt intense pain in his legs. Still, he moved, and exceeded the Far East's estimations.

...It would be nice if through this action, they will see Tres España's worth and spread it on the net, allowing more to invest in their own country. Their nation was in a lot of debt and filing for bankruptcy for the second time.

With people expecting the third time soon, the other countries are reluctant to invest in them.

Gin was thinking about this morning, when she received an announcement regarding the issue and what would happen next.

Muneshige offered Futayo, whose figure Gin could not see from her side, the spear Tonbokiri.

Tonbokiri did not move. Futayo was most likely examining Muneshige, to see whether he really suffered no wounds from last night's battle or otherwise. But, after a while...

"...I am indebted to you."

Tonbokiri was passed over to the other side.

Then Gin listened to the words the female warrior chose to speak, without seeing her expression. Those were:

“I, Honda Futayo, swear on this weapon, Tonbokiri, that I will surpass my father.”

I see, Gin thought.

...She was-...

They managed to display the futility of the will to resist to the Far Eastern people, but they have probably made a troublesome opponent in the process.

...I wonder.

In the Far East as it is now, are there capable people that are able to respond to her will?

In a dimly-lit room.

It was a white room, lit with not the light from the outside, but with that from a monitor.

At the center of the room were two figures.

One was that of the automaton with long, white hair.

The other, combing the automaton's hair with a black comb, was that of a female Tres España student.

The automaton, with her gaze remaining on the wall, posed a question to the girl behind her.

“If I may ask, what time is it now?”

“Tes, Horizon-sama. Right now, I think that it is half past nine. Are you thinking about something?”

“Judge, how are the preparations outside going?”

At her words, the female student's combing stopped for a moment. But, resuming her actions...

“Right now, the execution grounds (Andamio de la Ejecucion) are being reorganized. The place where a lord of a country is to carry out his will should not be called the ‘execution ground’ after all. We are decorating the place with

tatami mats and ornaments as an act of gratitude. After the preparations are done, at 2 PM we will have Horizon-sama undergo a health examination, as well as ascertain the presence of the Logismoí Óplo Horizon-sama possesses.”

“Judge. It will be six in the evening when Horizon will end her life, then.”

“Tes. In regards to that, a change of clothes will be prepared. If there are specific clothes that you desire, please do not hesitate to ask for them. The Testament Union will grant your wish.”

“Judge,” Horizon murmured.

“Being the head is quite troublesome indeed, don’t you think? Causing trouble for everyone and whatnot.”

At those words, the student’s combing movements stopped yet again.

Opening her mouth.

“Umm...”

Hesitating in her words.

“Horizon-sama, you...”

With a small quiver in her voice.

“...are prepared, are you not?”

Horizon neither affirmed nor denied her words. She answered with a natural expression.

“Where recreation of history is concerned, this situation is one of the more important for the duties of the head, after all.”

She drew a breath.

“In this one year I was living without knowing who I am and what I should do. Horizon’s soul was for some reason that of a human; but with the intellect of an automaton, my thought processes, decisions and memories are all based on an automaton. I possess no emotion. That is why Horizon...”

A moment.

“Remembering the daily life and memories of the past year, I was always

having doubts about my existence as an automaton. About what I, P-01s, truly was.”

“That is...”

“Judge, I was able to know last night. The suddenness of the revelation was unprecedented so I didn’t understand as well as I should have at first, but putting the pieces together it was a story that easily made sense. Also, before that I had also heard something that can become a very convincing factor towards the credibility of this case. That is...”

Horizon raised her face to look at the white wall in front of her.

“The possibility that after Horizon was run over by Father’s carriage, she remained in a state between life and death. Abandoning the body that cannot be repaired by medical treatment, the soul was transported to this body. Then, the eight emotions that could not be stored along with the soul in my throat were left in this world as the Logismoi Óplo. It was a story that was easy to understand. It is just that I did not expect the Logismoi Óplo to be involved in saving the world from the Apocalypse at all. Also...”

Also...

“The Far East is forbidden from possessing weapons; but since Horizon’s soul is one, my very existence becomes a sin the Far East holds. And the Far East needed to take responsibility and pay for the destruction of Mikawa last night, in one form or another. ...In other words, Horizon is just an automaton, a weapon that should not have been, but given the position of the head without even having the emotion of fear.”

Thus.

“...Who Horizon is and what I should do; I have finally found the clearest answer. The favors I could obtain and problems I could avoid were also clear. Those were the facts that Horizon is someone who did not even earn the right to live; someone that will never achieve anything.”

Somewhere along her words, the movements of the student combing Horizon’s hair stopped completely.

The female student, with her face down, thus questioned in this way.

“If...you were to possess emotion, how would you be, Horizon-sama?”

“Judge. ...That I cannot answer, because I do not have any experience of possessing emotions.”

“Only,” Horizon said, her gaze never moving away from the white wall where nothing was.

“If Horizon were to rely on the information from the books I have read, whether as reference or as the things that I have learned, I would be able to obtain the best answer to this question.”

“Is that... Wanting to be saved?”

Horizon pondered, hearing that question.

Under the best decision, she would never have thought about wanting to be saved. But...

“I wonder.”

“...Eh?”

“The decisions of an automaton are perfect, and prioritized over anything else. ...Among the choices I have that will lead to the best decision, the thought of wanting to be saved should be there. But right now, that choice is being silenced and shut out from my thoughts.”

I wonder.

Horizon only stated thus, referring to the possibility.

“Right now, Horizon is acting under the best decision. In the case where Horizon would want a decision other than that of the best, that is, if my decision to commit suicide is no more than because of my perfect decision as an automaton. ...If something was to be presented to Horizon as a better decision than what an automaton could think of, Horizon-...”

I wonder.

“If someone were to meet me with a judgement equal to that of an automaton, he or she will definitely be able to overturn my decision.”

The sound of a breath being drawn was heard on the other side, but its

meaning was not understood.

Only, accompanied by the word “Tes” from the female student, the comb was removed down from Horizon’s hair.

The black comb glided through the white hair, reflecting a white light, and separated from it.

Matching her movements, the female student spoke thus.

“...Do you want to read a book? If you require it, I will have one brought over.”

“Judge. Then, please bring one for me. Something with more worth than possession.”

“Tes, that was quite the difficult request.”

The student’s voice had a hint of a smile in it. Taking the comb out of her hair...

“...It will be chosen based on the current trends, but I will provide one for you. While reading, please wait for the examination in the afternoon, then.”

That moment.

A bell sounded. It sounded far away, like the roar of the sea. The small, yet definite sound, was...

“The bell of the Ariadust Academy, was it? It did sound a while ago as well, but now...”

The female student stated.

“That was the sound of one hour passing. I heard that the noisiest class is being quite silent today. Because of the difficult composition class they are having or something.”

Study: **The Musashi Ariadust Academy**

●The Musashi Ariadust Academy●

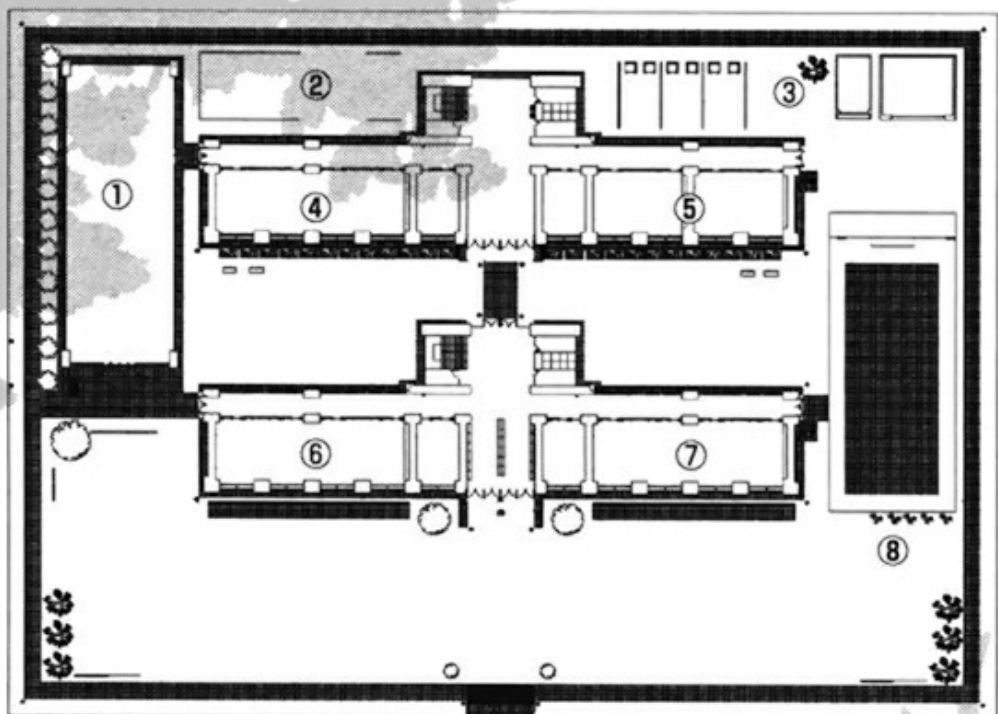


"Nee-chan! Nee-chan! Is there a plan or something of our Academy grounds? We need a map to know where to set things up and hide around in, you know? A map!"

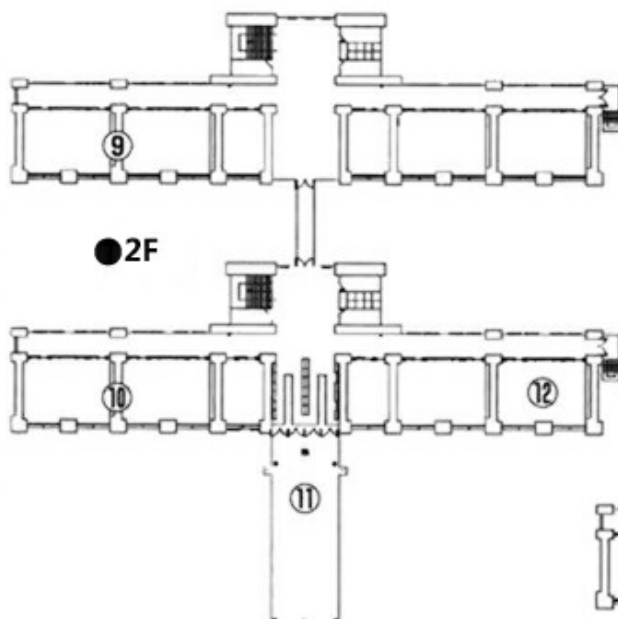


"Fufufu, stealthy brother, for now I'll spread out one of the buildings so take a look."

●1F



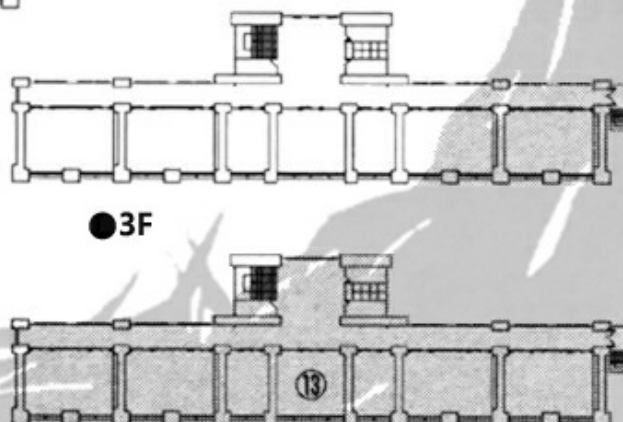
●2F



- ① Cafeteria
- ② Archery Room
- ③ Furnace, Storeroom
- ④ Art Room
- ⑤ Metalwork and Woodwork Rooms
- ⑥ Library
- ⑦ Staffroom
- ⑧ Pool
- ⑨ Biology and Chemistry Laboratories
- ⑩ Music and Cooking Rooms
- ⑪ Front Bridge
- ⑫ 3-Plum
- ⑬ Student Council Room

※Chancellor Officers' hall is outside the Academy, but meetings mostly held in the Student Council Room as well.

●3F



"Uoo, how small! So that's why they put up that removable bridge; our campus barely reaches the 100m mark in diagonal measurements so we need the space!"



"Yep, that is why we have two entrances at the front. That is just the kind of place we are living our life in."

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! Is there a plan or something of our Academy grounds? We need a map to know where to set things up and hide around in, you know? A map!

Kimi: Fufufu, stealthy brother, for now I'll spread out one of the buildings so take a look.

Above: ●1st Floor

Middle: ●2nd Floor

Below: ●3rd Floor

1. Cafeteria
2. Archery Room
3. Furnace, Storeroom
4. Art Room
5. Metalwork & Woodwork Rooms
6. Library
7. Staffroom
8. Pool
9. Biology and Chemistry Laboratories
10. Music and Cooking Rooms
11. Front Bridge
12. 3-Plum
13. Student Council Room

※ Chancellor Officers' hall is outside the Academy, but meetings mostly held in the Student Council Room as well.

Toori: Uoo, how small! So that's why they put up that removable bridge; our campus barely reaches the 100m mark in diagonal measurements so we need the space!

Kimi: Yep, that is why we have two entrances at the front. That is just the kind of place we are living our life in.

Chapter 25: Advocate at the Confession Grounds

CHAPTER 25

"Advocate at the Confession Grounds"



To first decide on one's own wish
To wish for the words that would decide everything
What would that be?

Point Allocation (Essay)

To first decide on one's own wish

To wish for the words that would decide everything

What would that be

Point Allocation (Essay)

The bell sounded, stating the beginning of the second period.

The title of the essay assigned to the class was written on the blackboard: "What I Want to Do".

Everyone was filling their manuscript paper with letters using writing tools like brushes and charcoal pens. Among them, one person had her head in her arms.

It was Asama.

With her head held between her hands, elbows on the table, Asama was hanging her head down.

She thought. She'll be screwed at this rate. She faced down on the table, still holding her head.

...Whatever it may be, my family is a priesthood after all.

Such an occupation basically does things for others. Having a natural role as a mediator, transmitting the intentions of the gods to the people, one would need to be honest and free of desire.

...Despite everything, "What I Want to Do"? What is with this killer theme...!

Think. There are three things I want to do.

1. Will someone please take over the ground cleaning duty for me? ← What the hell am I wanting to slack for!?

2. Will someone please make snacks or food for me? ← Gluttony! Gluttony!!

3. Will someone please tell Father to quit using young people's slang so recklessly? ← Dad will cry-!

Asama held her head yet again.

While she wondered whether 3 would happen, most people would just be like “Why the hell is a priest thinking something like that!?”

She indirectly asked everyone about it during the break earlier, but she only held the utmost jealousy towards how quickly everyone’s desires rushed out of their minds.

- **Heidi: “I want to do unspeakable things to Shiro-kun!” ← So it would be acceptable in letter form!?**

- **Adele: “Will someone please make me taller?” ← Can anyone even do that!?**

- **Kimi: “Money! Free time! Beauty! I don’t need things like love!” ← What is with that manly wish!?**

...It’s hopeless, I won’t get anything from the opinions of those carnal creatures.

Whatever the case, pretty much all the jokes are of the dirty kind with this class.

All the guys were putting their heads together and going on about a lot of things, but I’m pretty sure their conversations were something like “Let’s find out who is the most evil of us all!” to the ears of a priest.

People like Urquiaga, being part of the Inquisition, should have had at least a noble ambition of some kind; but he was with Tenzou saying things like: “No, I am not like you are, ha ha ha.”

“No, I am not like you are, ha ha ha.”

...So they can just fall straight into hell shoulder to shoulder.

Still, other than those guys, only one person never joined the circle.

“...”

Still hanging her head, Asama moved her gaze. Stooped over the farthest desk to the back, by the window, was...

...Toori-kun, huh.

Asama thought. Everyone was concerned about him today. He was the one everyone would turn to, with the stories he tells while his eyes go over to the distance.

If she were to ask, everyone would deny their worry for him. Still, they were concerned; that was just the kind of relationship they had.

She didn't know much about what had happened to him after he rushed over to Horizon's place last night.

She heard that Oriotorai helped smooth over the hearing at the police station, stating to the Testament Union that he only came over hearing that his childhood friend was still alive, without any other intentions.

...Still, it has been a while since I saw Toori-kun like this.

There was a time, very long ago, when he was like that: rejecting the world around him. We couldn't do anything for him, and only heard about the time Kimi brought him back to his senses.

She remembered that time clearly. She also recalled the time before as well.

They were together for a long time. Because their parents knew each other, they were very close friends.

To be honest, there were also times when they were conscious of each other's sexes.

That was during primary school. When everyone learned of the festival of the Saint of Love, Valentine, the girls naturally began to dare among themselves to give out love presents to others, calling anyone who didn't a chicken bastard.

Valentine was a Catholic saint of the Roman Era. According to the Testament, he spread the message around that the Roman Emperor banned marriage to his soldiers as he feared the fall of their fighting morale.

Because of that Valentine was executed, but he earned respect among the people as the Saint of Love.

Even in history recreation, the person who inherited Valentine's name encouraged the marriage of soldiers with a resolve to die doing so.

...Yes, under the name of history recreation, marriage between soldiers

became compulsory.

Under the name of history recreation, soldiers under the Roman Emperor were to marry each other if they were caught by Valentine; so panic rose and people ran all over the place. Still, one by one they were captured by Valentine and married off; the fighting morale of the soldiers certainly fell, accompanied by a thousand screams. In order to end the reality of waking up to each other in a positive note, they called Valentine the Saint of Love, but...

...Well, it is only a matter of course that Valentine himself would be executed, no?

In a present study, there were discussions about whether or not there was a large mistake in that method of recreation; but the dispute was ended on a positive note by saying that there were no differences in the results of the recreation.

The festival of Valentine was a Western event by nature, but both Shinto and Buddhism were ambiguous religions that tolerated the matters of others.

There was the Prohibited Religion Act, but the celebrations still could go on under the interpretation of “Community Support of Other Religions”.

Asama belonged to a lineage of Shinto, but after various complications and circumstances she was given permission by her father to join the Western festival provided that she gave him a present as well. At that time the gift was coincidentally chocolate, something that had only appeared on the market recently.

While making the chocolate, she was thinking about whom to give it to; then...

...There's no one else but Toori-kun, huh...

They were childhood friends. Horizon was already gone at that point, but his old brightness has already returned to him. And, at last...

...He'll only take it lightly.

Other girls seemed to give him presents as well, if only as a means of escape. Thinking back, it was quite a rude thing to do; but she prioritized someone who

would not cause others to make noise around her, whether she liked him or not.

...Still, we were friends for a long time; I was nervous so I went to the Academy...

With self-made solid chocolate horns held between his sides and nether region, Toori was running around the school grounds chasing after both guys and girls saying “Look, I’m a triceratops dinosaur!”

As a result, not being able to give anyone the chocolate in the Academy, Asama returned home in the end with the chocolate never taken out from her bag.

She still remembered Toori’s joyful remarks like “Turn around! Turn around!” and “Aah, it’s melting!” mixed with everyone’s screams of disorientation. She could not forget the bitter taste of the chocolate she ate after returning home, mixed with her tears. It was pure cocoa after all, because she forgot to add in the sugar. Thinking back, that was what caused her to cry, huh. Father was crying as well after all.

Still, looking at the triceratops making noise down the corridor, Asama thought thus: *The act of life is not the same.*

It was a Styracosaurus in middle school, so the act should have been determined from childhood. Over those few years, any girl who even thought of giving a present to anyone would have to fight the indiscriminately hindering Toori and his followers.

Even then, looking at such a scene over and over again, Asama had this thought as well: *...Perhaps, has he come to understand?*

Everyone else should have, as well. In contrast to the “chicken bastard” dare between the girls, there was a trend between the guys to call anyone who did not receive a gift a loser. Furthermore, if there were girls who did not have the courage to give anyone a present, there would be boys who could not defy the trend as well. The names of such people were concealed. Still, because of Toori’s actions, everyone could participate in the festival.

...I wonder...?

Because of his all too different act, there were no incidents concerning the opposite genders after that. Because she was with Kimi as well, he felt like a brother or a cousin of the same year to her; so she thought: *...If I were to choose, because of Kimi being Kimi, I feel more like a mother here...*

Still, Asama thought while looking at his figure rushing off after hearing Horizon's name on the broadcast.

...I was shocked, wasn't I?

Asama thought. His way of acting was different compared to hers. Not only hers, but likely from everyone else as well; including the one he ran after. She wondered what he would have looked like in Horizon's eyes as she is now.

She had become an automaton, without any memories. There was that gap of ten years' time between them as well. Even Toori should have understood that. He said that he loved her and meant that in the present moment.

Even when they really haven't talked all that much...

...He still ran after her.

He hasn't taken it lightly after all.

One would wonder about the case of the Plesiosaur he did this year; but differing from that lightness he showed, there is something heavy at the deepest part of his heart. No matter the case, he would have made his decisions according to that heavy part; then displayed only his carefree side when it was time to act. The reason for that would have been...

"..."

Asama looked towards Suzu who sat in the seat on her right. She was writing on the manuscript paper in a way that suited her inability to see. Suzu had told her about something the day before.

...The fact that Horizon started the way we talked to and held our hands out to Suzu-san...

He was to accept her, and...

...Everything was meant to begin again, but...

Yet again, she was gone.

Thus, Toori returned to his depressed state similar to his condition in the past.

...I wonder if he's alright.

Thinking that, Asama let go of her head and reached out for the writing tool with her right hand.

With her chin on her left hand, her gaze went up to the ceiling.

Staring up there with a lot of things on her mind, she finally started thinking about what to write about. The beginning was...

...Do your best.

Today was supposed to be the long-awaited day of his confession. If last night's incident had not happened, how would he have been like?

Everyone would have wished success for him.

...Umm.

She thought about how he would have acted. The way he usually did.

The first to rise from her heart was...

...He'll grope her breasts-...

Wait. No matter the case, that would have been too sudden.

No way, no way, thought Asama, her eyes half-closed looking at the ceiling, lost in her heart, waving her neck from side to side.

...The confession must come first. I don't know if he'll use a letter or whatnot.

What's important is that he is sincere. Sincerity. That's what both of them must confirm to.

Then Asama closed her eyes, continuing to think.

She hypothesized what would happen from there, if novels and television dramas were anything to go by.

They would have come close together, then embraced each other with a smile

or something. No; Horizon is an automaton, so she doesn't have emotions and thus can't smile. Still, if Horizon gave her permission carelessly, it would have been fine for her to fall into his embrace without any expression; furthermore the judgement of automatons would have mostly considered everything, so how much longer could Toori-kun keep his calm after that? Naturally, he will grope her breasts; and then next, umm, err, like a kiss? Umm, eeh? Eeeeh? How far is this going to go, up here? All the way there? Umm-...

"Ah."

Before she knew it, Asama's eyes looked forward. Looking past the figures of everyone bent forward to write on their manuscript papers from her side, Oriotorai was looking over to her, both elbows on the teacher's desk and neck tilted to the side. Asama straightened her posture.

"Ah, s-sensei, what is it!?"

"Ah, yes, do you need more paper?"

Why? she thought, looking downwards. All her copies of paper were overflowing with words.

The contents were...

"——"

Feeling a sensation extending from below her nose towards both sides of her face...

...I'm writing an ero-novel, am I not!? And the title is "What I Want to Do"!

No. This must not be. What in the world am I doing? Going straight to that place from just a confession is just being too impatient! If anyone were to read this it'll be banned from Life boardgames at first notice!

Panicking, Asama brought out an erasing pressure pen from her case and rubbed it on the manuscript paper. But...

"H-huh...?"

The writings won't go away. Thinking about why...

...No way, did I use an ink pen for this-?

She looked to her right hand and found the mentioned thing held there.

The figure of the charcoal pencil, whose writing can be erased, was visible in her pencil box; but the distance between them was cruelly far. Thus, feeling something heavy on her lower body...

“...Nu.”

Hanging her head, a stifled voice leaked out from inside her throat.

She felt the sweat coming out without her control sticking to her whole body.

The reason for her screw-up was simple. She was careless about her ability to focus. Still, understanding this at such a time was no use.

...S-still, what is with this ero-novel!? I can't believe I wrote this for class!

I see, thus Asama thought. I'll just hide this in the desk and start over.

...Right, here goes-...

“Okay, everyone should be done by now, so can I have someone who's done stand up and read their essay out for us? Umm, let's see, someone who looks like he's done. ...Asama. You look like you're finished, so can you read yours out?”

“Eeeeh!? N-no way! There's no way I can read this!!”

Asama sprang out of her seat. Frantically looking around her, she saw that everyone was already looking on with anticipation.

Still warmly sweating, Asama thought. But she could not think up anything; thus, reflexively, Asama stated the truth for now.

“This, this is, you know? This is, umm, err. ...Right! This is not an essay!”

“Oh?”

Oriotorai bent backwards from the teacher's desk and narrowed her eyes.

“That's a new one. Well, what is it?”

“No, see, well, um...”

Whatever, thus she said the truth.

“Then, it's an evil thought I caught! I turned it into words and sealed it with

the manuscript paper!”

“Oh. ...Working even in the classroom, it must be tough over at the Asama shrine.”

“Y-yes, it is! It’s very hard! Shooting out things like apparitions feels good, you know!? It’s the same thing here, umm. ...Incinerator! Can I go to the incinerator!?”

“Wait, leave that for after. Other people are still having class.”

Eeeh, destruction impossible? Asama thought, but for now she seemed to have avoided having to read it out.

After she sat back in her seat for a moment, Oriotorai parted her gaze from her.

“Well, it looks like Asama wrote out something different, so...”

The one on Asama’s right shrunk her body at her words. Oriotorai looked over to that place.

Suzu.

Looking over there, Oriotorai said with a greeting:

“Then... Suzu.”

“Ah, y...yes?”

To Suzu’s answer that held a hint of surprise, Oriotorai showed her smile.

“Suzu. Is it alright to read yours out?”

...Wait a minute, why didn’t you ask me the same question just now!?

She thought that, but this must be her being mindful of other people’s character.

Privately, she sighed in her heart, wondering what the response would be. Still, Suzu replied.

“...Yes, it, it’s fine.”

At her response, Asama’s body cooled down.

...It’s fine, is it?

Around Asama, everyone's eyes were looking at Suzu, probably thinking the same thing as she was.

All their gazes had a shade of worry.

She knew what it meant. Suzu's eyes cannot see. To even line up the words on the paper, most of which were written in hiragana...for her this was next to impossible. Even for her to read what she wrote; if she were to use the scanning part of the IZUMO-made pen "Voice Out!" located on her back, the contents would be read out loud into the headphones she was wearing.

Still, right now, the manuscript paper lay on top of Suzu's desk.

...There are more than ten...

All of them were lined up with words. Even if their sizes varied and their orders were in disorganization, most of the words were there. That's why Oriotorai asked: "Umm, Suzu? Can you read it by yourself?"

To Oriotorai's question, Suzu shook her head from side to side.

That can only mean that she is entrusting her own wish, that she wrote herself, to another person to read out for her.

Asama felt something being pricked from inside her chest.

Even if Suzu wrote something normal instead of the ero-novel she had written...

...Can I even let someone else read it out...?

Still, drawing a breath, Suzu said this:

"Anyone, p-please."

Right, Oriotorai's voice could be heard to say.

"Well, then, Asama, read it out for her."

Suzu heard the sound of Asama's short gasp beside her.

The next thing she heard was her voice.

"Umm, Suzu-san. ...Is it alright?"

“Judge.”

Suzu nodded.

...It'll be fine if it's Asama.

It'll be fine because both of us understand each other on various things, Suzu thought. *She'll surely be able to read it out with the same thoughts as mine.* Thus, ascertaining their presence on the desk by touching them with her hand, Suzu gathered the manuscript papers together.

“Here. I, w-wrote numbers, on them, s-so, read them, in order.”

She held them out in Asama's direction.

For a moment, the sound of Asama's thin breath could be heard; and finally...

“Sure.”

Accompanied by her affirmation, there was a brushing sound of a uniform's sleeve, and the manuscript paper was lightly taken over to the other side of the aisle. Thus Suzu let go of her hand. She let go of the thing containing the thoughts she wrote towards the person who she believed could pass it on.

...Please.

She wished.

...Reach.

As if to pray, she handed it over.

Holding the bundle of manuscript paper in her hands, Asama slowly stood up.

She no longer cared about everyone's gazes.

...This is the same as a ritual.

Being similar to the offering of a Shinto prayer to a god, there was a need to remove all worldly thoughts from her words.

Words were an expression of thoughts; they were a medium for one to bring their thoughts together with another. That was why each and every one of one's pure words, whether they be spoken or written, possess the absolute

power of resonating with the will.

If she were to read Suzu's thoughts, there would be a need to cast away her own thoughts to allow Suzu's words to properly reach everyone.

Everyone would have wished for the same. This was one of the very few cases the thoughts of the usually reserved Suzu which she wrote herself were exposed for everyone to hear after all.

It was her duty to correlate the words she spoke to the written words entrusted to her without error.

Thus Asama closed her eyes for a moment and straightened her posture. Holding up the manuscript paper as a greeting, she drew a breath.

"I will now recite this in her place."

"Go on~."

Over on the other side, her hands on the teacher's desk, Oriotorai's smile showed light relief. Everyone, including Suzu, probably did the same as well. *If that's the case it's fine*; with that thought, Asama cast her gaze down to the manuscript paper.

The number written on the upper right part of the paper was 1.

The numeral was in a contorted shape. For Suzu, who cannot see, her recollection of the characters she needed to understand and be understood by others are no more than what her hand movements leave. The overshots of her nervousness, the quivers of her pauses as well as all other imperfections could clearly be seen; but, still...

...It was written with a lot of care.

Nothing was left out, and nothing was simplified. Her making up for her overshots and pauses was also properly done.

Thinking how earnest it was, Asama thought...

...Is this what it feels like to be touched by Suzu-san?

The girl who couldn't see was definitely standing up straight and walking forward. There were times when someone helped her up when she tripped and

fell, but she was straightforward, nevertheless.

Thinking that it's as if that itself was inscribed into the written word, Asama held out her right hand.

“— —”

Touching the words written on the paper with her fingers; then, from the bottom of her throat...

“What I Want to Do.”

She read.

“I have...”

She continued.

“...a person I like.”

“I have a person I like.”

With gentle movements, everyone had their gaze on Suzu. Still...

“I have had one for a very long time.”

With her back to the wall on the corridor's side, Suzu had her face straight forward. Her eyes, hidden behind her long bangs, couldn't see; but precisely because of that it was as if she was looking at everyone.

“It was during the entrance ceremony in primary school.”

Suzu listened to Asama's words.

“I didn't like it. I didn't like going to the Academy.”

That's right, Suzu thought.

She felt as if she was reminiscing on her own past. It was probably because of the way Asama read it out.

“Father and Mother were busy in my house from the morning.”

A moment, breathing out along with Asama...

“...Both of them could not come. I was by myself during the ceremony.”

She remembered even now. They apologized to her during breakfast.

Now, she understood. While they have their own activities as well, both her parents were working to cover her tuition fees.

She was never aware of that then. Still...

“But so that Father and Mother wouldn’t be worried, I didn’t cry.”

She didn’t understand why, but she thought it was because of her parents’ apology that she must not cry.

But...

“I really wanted them to congratulate me.”

“The Academy was on a high place on the outer part.

“There were long stairs, the stairs I hated.

“That was why, in front of the stairs, I thought.

“ ‘If no one would congratulate me, it’ll be fine not to climb up the stairs, right?’

“Other people, the people I first met, didn’t notice me.

“They were climbing up the stairs with their mothers and fathers.

“I was by myself. But...”

“But...”

Asama read on. As if to devote her voice to the letters brushing against her fingers...

“I heard a voice.

“ ‘Hey, what’s wrong?’

“ ‘Hey, why are you crying?’ ”

It was.

“It was Toori-kun and Horizon.”

“Both of them were together. They were alone together.

“Their fathers and mothers were at work.

“Toori-kun suddenly grabbed my hand.

“Horizon was mad for a bit.

“Then Horizon took my left hand...

“...and persuaded me to climb the stairs.”

“I asked them.

“ ‘Is it alright?’ ”

Asama’s voice resounded throughout the room.

“The ceremony was already starting.

“I told them that they will be late.

“But Toori said ‘I’m a delinquent, you know?’

“Horizon laughed.”

With her breath, everyone took their own.

Then...

“Then, Horizon took my hands.

“Toori-kun supported my back.

“And we climbed up the stairs together.”

Another breath.

“I remember.

“I remembered.”

“I remember.

“The scent of the wind, the sound of sakura petals falling.

“The echoes of the town, the roar of the sky, everyone’s voices; everything.

“Before I knew it, I was climbing the stairs.

“I came to realize.

“Somewhere along the line, both of them let go of my hands and back.

“I was climbing the stairs on my own.”

“I climbed the stairs on my own.

“But the three of us were climbing the stairs together-...”

Asama turned over the manuscript paper and moved her gaze to the next page.

“And I realized.

“On top of the stairs, everyone was waiting for us.”

Ah, someone murmured quietly. There was something like that.

“Everyone was cheering me on.”

“Toori-kun said.

“With Horizon, both of them said.

“ ‘Congratulations, and we’ll be in your care from now on.’ ”

“When I came home, I talked with Father and Mother.

“They were happy and they congratulated me.

“They said ‘You did well, didn’t you?’ and I cried again.”

The manuscript paper was turned over again. The sound traveled all over the room.

“The middle school was on the second level, so there were no stairs.

“There were stairs in high school, but...

“I could already climb up on them.

“Still, Toori-kun, just once, during the entrance ceremony...

“...he held my hand.

“It was my left hand, the one Horizon used to hold.”

A breath was drawn. After that, yet again, Asama gently...

“Everyone was waiting for me on top, like before.

“Then Toori-kun let go of my hand, just like Horizon did.

“I climbed the stairs on my own and got together with everyone...

“...but Horizon wasn't there.”

Asama's fingers ran over the next few words, and pressed on them with a little strength.

Still, with the same pace as before, she continued reciting the words.

“I have a person I like.”

That was.

“I love Toori-kun.”

She continued.

“I love Horizon.”

As if building up...

“I love everyone.”

Then...

“I love Toori-kun the most when he is with Horizon.”

“Please.”

“I'm alright by myself now.

“That’s why, just like how you held my hand-...”

As if to stop Asama’s words, Suzu’s body moved. Raising her thighs from the chair, ignoring even the pain of her body hitting the desk, she stood up and spoke before Asama could turn her head.

“Please! Save Horizon...!”

She drew a breath and opened her mouth.

“Toori-kun...!!”



Suzu's body shivered from the loudness of her own voice.

Her roughened breathing and the surge of heat on her body, neither backing down, continued to be transmitted to her ears and skin.

Still, Suzu thought.

...Reach...

She understood neither politics nor business well. She felt the pessimism in Shirojiro's standpoint towards Musashi's fate, but that probably is how reality is. Her thoughts were no more than simple expressions of discontent from an emotional standpoint. Still...

...I was saved by Horizon long ago after all...

She wanted to reach out to the person who continued what Horizon did as if to succeed her.

"Please..."

She stated. And at that moment...

A voice suddenly reached her from right in front of her. It was not that of Asama.

"Hey, hey, Bell-san, you'd do better than to look down on me. I'm planning to do just that, you know?"

It was the young man's voice she remembered hearing. Puffing out his chest, making a sound with the ornamental chains on his uniform.

"Rest assured. I, Aoi Toori, am right here."

Hearing the sound of a breath being drawn, the next to come were the words that were mixed in with happiness.

"And also, Bell-san, you know?"

She heard.

"Why are you crying?"

Everyone looked on. Over on the corridor side of the classroom, by the wall in a slightly darkened place, Suzu and Toori were facing each other.

Leaving the tears streaming down from below her long bangs be, without wiping them off, Suzu...

“Toori...kun...”

“Yep, it’s me. It’s Toori-kun.”

To his light response, Suzu’s expression changed, forming a smile with her quivering lips.

“Y-you see? I’m, already, f-fine.”

Suzu lightly beat her thighs with both her arms. As the Suspended Scroll-type Sensors attached to the hardpoints on her hip made a sound like a bell, both her hands reached out in Toori’s direction.

Toori’s hands, laid on his knees, moved in response. He held them out and allowed each of her thin hands to touch them. It was a gesture of respect and praise. Right then...

“You, see...”

Suzu held both of Toori’s hands and pressed them down on her chest. Nn, she made a sound, her face turning red, but turned to look in Toori’s direction.

“I, g-grew up properly, didn’t...I?”

“Yep, it’s the clear truth.”

“Y-yes, s-so, I-I’m not like, before, anymore.”

“Yeah, you’re working hard every day at stuff like the committee, aren’t you? Over at the reference room and rabbit pens.”

Over their side, Asama was looking over at everyone with a confused face. With only her lips...

“What is with this situation? I don’t know whether to be glad or pissed about it!”

Everyone shook their hands left and right in response.

“Don’t mind it. You were on the primary school on the other road, weren’t you?”

“It does feel like an oath between a knight and a princess, but he’s just being a pervert in reality, huh...”

“Or rather, why are they treating breast-groping like a coming of age ceremony here?”

“Hey, you guys, why is the atmosphere this bad when I’m at a good part?”

Everyone ignored his words.

Realizing everyone was looking at their act, Suzu’s face reddened even more and slowly let go of Toori’s hands. But Toori, his hands still held out, panicked and begged to her.

“Ah! Wait, I have to prepare my heart! Just a bit more! Load at the good part! Load!”

“You’re not at the good part at all!”

Ignoring everyone’s punchline, Toori held out a hand to Suzu.

Brushing his sleeve once, he turned to face her, who was standing up with a reddened face.

“Hey, Bell-san?”

He patted her as if to insert his hands in between strands of her hair as if to correct Suzu, who let out a voice at his actions.

“Can I make a bit of a correction?”

“Wh-what?”

“Yep,” Toori said.

“I didn’t hold your hand because I was worried about you, Bell-san. I just wanted to try holding your hand because you’re so cute and nice. I was just thinking about how good it would be to do so, you know? ...Everyone else, guys or girls, you think so too, no?”

To his question, everyone looked at each other for a moment, but surely answered.

“Judge.”

Judge, that was everyone’s judgement.

Turning to everyone with a smile, Suzu wiped away her tears...which had stopped streaming.

“Thank...you.”

Right after, Shirojiro suddenly spoke up with his hands in his lap and a bitter smile mixed in.

“So you’re finally up from your crying nap, huh? You’ve wasted quite a bit of our time, you idiot.”

“Huh? Crying nap? Are you a moron? Look closely at my desk.”

Right after Toori’s words, Kimi turned her head and approached his desk. After a few moments, the thing she brought up between her forefinger and thumb was...

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, what is this eroge magazine? ‘Azuchi Castle, Eastern Hall: Kanouha^[4] Brand Edition’?”

“Ah? No, Sis! Not that one! No, not ‘The Real Era: Team Velázquez Edition’ either!”

“Huh?” Kimi said, spreading out the next page for everyone to see. The samples of the color prints laid out on the pages had something in common. Realizing that, Tenzou said the common point in a small voice.

“...It’s a silver-haired character feature, isn’t it?”

“Yep, because Horizon has that hair color after all! I swiped the magazine from the police station and spent all morning looking at them filling up my manliness gauge! I filled up seven of them...!”

While he was laughing, someone patted on his shoulder from behind.

Toori turned around to look along with everyone; Oriotorai was there, her face full of pity.

She looked at him with half-closed, upturned eyes.

“While people were bailing you out of the police station, you were filling up your gauge, huh?”

“Hey, I’m grateful to you, sensei, you know? They were making me eat something horrible again, after all. Still, just because you don’t understand my adorable, neat and clean ways doesn’t mean you can bully me, sensei. At that age...”

Toori said.

“Are you still a kid at 100,027 years old!?”

In the middle of their reading period the students of Class 3-Bamboo and the teacher, Sanyou, encountered the Toori who flew through the wall behind the class, twirling.

At the back of the class, Sanyou was reading the horror piece “The Thirteen Days of Abstinence – 8: Valentine Goes to Rome”, but she had bad timing. She also made a mistake in starting at the part where the Roman Emperor was going on about stuff like “Right, let’s make it dry tonight!” while preparing to bathe. Her reading figure was facing towards the front of the classroom. As if to recreate the assault of Valentine holding two chocolate baseball bats, there was a sudden, thunderous roar of destruction. As Sanyou turned back...

“Hyaaa...! The manhunt is here...!!”

“Aah, sorry about that, Sanyou, I got the walls mixed up. Forgive me, I’ll take care of that after.”

Turning her head, half-crying, Sanyou saw Oriotorai pulling Toori out from the rubble by the collar and into the hole made in the wall.

Ignoring the numerous gazes on her, Oriotorai threw Toori to the other side of the hole and quietly went back through it.

Finally, she waved her hand over to this side.

“Yep, it’s fine. It’s just a little push, a little push!”

She left with those self-centered words.

The hole was immediately blocked, this time by a curtain set up by the people on the other side.

“...So? What are you planning to do?”

Oriotorai, standing in front of the hole in the wall beside the blackboard, turned to face Toori who was sitting on the teacher’s desk.

Raising her eyebrows slightly, she posed a question to the person cross-legged on top of the table.

“Going to save Horizon. ...How are you going to achieve that?”

“How, huh? ...Well, for the most part, I already made sense of this whole stalemate thing.”

“Is that so? So it’s a stalemate, huh?”

Oriotorai showed a smile to Toori.

“Well then, how about you explain to me what kind of stalemate this is?”

To that answer, Toori let out a “let’s see” and raised his right index finger. He opened his mouth, but...

“——”

“...Hey, did you really understand?”

“D-don’t say such silly things, sensei! I do! Of course I do, you know!?”

“Then, can I get an explanation about whatever this stalemate is?”

“No, that’s why, you see...”

After three seconds, Toori pulled out a textbook from his bag and slammed it onto the teacher’s desk.

“Damn! What is this! What’s with this female teacher! Is it that much fun to chase me around!? Though I’m super excited that you are, you know!? What do you think of that!?”

“Alright. Before that, can I use my full strength?”

“Oh my, did I strike the nerve of a yeti’s instinct!? How cruel can I be!?”

Toori ignored Oriotorai’s half-closed eyes and turned his head away. Hanging her head, with her palm to her forehead.

“Sigh...”

In the middle of their reading period, the students of Class 3-Bamboo and the teacher, Sanyou, encountered the Toori who, as if to repeat its destruction, flew through the wall behind the class twirling.

Behind the rising smoke...

“Owww! Sensei! Aren’t you being too harsh with that punchline!?”

“How noisy... Ah, Sanyou, sorry! But this is just another push, just another little one!”

Yet again, the newly made hole was covered by a curtain on the other side.

Under the gaze of Oriotorai behind him, Toori returned to sit on the teacher’s desk with his uniform torn here and there. Still, with a beat of his hand, looking at everyone...

“I’ve understood the main point of this stalemate so I’ll have it out here, part by part~.”

To his words, everyone turned to face each other. After a moment, whispers could be heard along with light applause.

“Man, he understood even to the point of the stalemate, despite being an idiot.”

“But really. ...Isn’t this case such an easy one to look at?”

“Toori talking about something other than breasts is news to me...”

“Hey, hey, you guys, don’t just associate my nature with idiocy and breasts, alright? It’ll look like I don’t talk about anything other than those two!”

“You don’t at all!!”

Fluttering around everyone's punchline, Toori looked at Oriotorai.

"Well, sensei. I know that we're in trouble, but I don't know what we should do from now on."

And continued like so:

"I only want to save and confess to her. ...That's why, first, let's see, hey, Shiro!"

"What is it, moron? I'll only entertain discussions about money."

"Then it's fine," Toori said.

"So you'll talk about economic activity, Shiro? Probably. The reason you went on about all the various things back then was because you likened our situation to money, right? Was it not? You're a narrow-minded, dangerous person with nothing in his head other than money and trade after all."

"Wait, wait, wait, you ass, don't just associate my nature with money calculations and trade. It'll look like I don't talk about anything other than those two after all."

"You don't at all either!!"

In response to everyone's punchline, Shirojiro turned to look at Heidi on his side.

"Am I always about money and trade?"

To his question, Heidi's face went red. Along with the white fox on her table, she put both her hands on her cheeks and wriggled around.

"I-I don't think I can answer that question."

"I see," Shirojiro nodded. He looked over to everyone, then turned to Toori.

"Alright, listen well, moron. I am fine. You are not. Seriously, calling someone a zombie of money? Truly a man of not even a shred of worth. You'll lose money for every second you talk to him, for real."

"You should do something about that, you know? How your way of speaking sounds like mine every so often. For now, you have quite a few ideas in your head, don't you? Whatever the case..."

Toori said.

“You can’t avoid considering all-out war with the Testament Union in your opinion, after all.”

To his words, everyone held their breath for a moment. Still, from among them...

“Heh heh. Foolish brother, you sure say stuff like that freely, don’t you? Do you know what that even means?”

“Aah? I mean, nothing would happen from just ignoring something that would happen, you know? Even for Sis, you’ll eventually grow old and your skin and...”

“Ah...! Ah...! Can’t hear you, can’t hear you!! That’s right, I’m a cute Methuselah...!”

Ignoring his sister shutting her ears off with her hands and raising a weird voice, Toori held his hands together.

“Well, no matter the problem, if it’s broken down and looked at, then conclusions drawn from it, we’ll get an answer or a decision, won’t we? Only those who’d get themselves drunk would want to follow serious directions here. Don’t think about it too much, and, well, just take it easy and think things through. ...Hey, miser, you do know your way around business, right? Where would someone like you start from, I wonder? Tell me, which one of the bricks of the wall in front of me can be broken through?”

To his question, Shirojiro changed his expression.

He let out a small laugh.

Fu, thus a small sound escaped his throat. Moving around his shoulders, Shirojiro faced Toori.

“It’ll cost a lot.”

“It’s a business opportunity, you know? I’m not smart, and I can’t do anything. I can only use that as an excuse. Still, because of that, lend me a bit of your head, miser.”

“I see,” Shirojiro said. Turning his shoulders, as if loosening them.

“Hanging your faults in front of my eyes as a business opportunity is what’s good about them.”

Whatever, thus Shiro turned to face everyone else.

“Now then, listen well, everyone. What is required for us to do is to not only secure the rights to negotiate with the king and the Provisional Council as well as our right to speak, but also to obtain an influential voice that will display our intended course of action. To that end, I have already stated our method before: we are to pull Honda Masazumi over to our camp.”

To the name he stated, everyone’s gazes met Shirojiro’s in response. Inside that atmosphere that wanted to say something but didn’t, applying a medical bandage to his cheek, Noriki opened his mouth.

“That might be impossible.”

“Why is that?”

“Say it yourself.”

To his question, Noriki gave a short answer and held his hands behind his back.

He had no intention to answer. That’s why, following through, Heidi spoke up. Looking up to Shirojiro who had his eyebrows down.

“I don’t think the parliament will allow Seijun to meet with us until Horizon’s suicide at six in the evening is over. It’ll be dangerous for them if Seijun, who still holds a student authority, were to meet us and have a change of heart.”

“I see. But, to say it conversely: ...The parliament side wants to keep a hold on the student authority; that is why they did not strip Masazumi of the position.”

Then.

“We’ll create a scenario in which Masazumi has no choice but to come, then pull her over to our side.”

“The method would be...”

“We’ll hold a special student general meeting.”

Huh? Thus everyone tilted their heads to Shirojiro’s words.

Even Toori stood up on the teacher's desk and wriggled.

"Huh? Are you an idiot!? I know all about it after what Heidi said, you know!? You can't hold a special student general meeting if students with authority are still here~. You're a true idiot, aren't you? Idi~ot, boo~."

"Miss Oriotorai, there is a way to hold the meeting even in that condition, isn't there?"

Oriotorai nodded to his question.

"You'll be able to talk about only one thing, but you can."

Huh? Thus Toori stopped his wriggling dance of triumph. Oriotorai and Shirojiro looked at each other.

After a while, Toori suddenly took off his uniform and kneeled, topless.

"Damn it...! Everyone's going out of their way to get me, aren't they!? Fine, fine! Laugh already! I'm sorry I was wrong, Shirojiro-sama...!!"

"You're quite the roller coaster, aren't you. ...Your social position, I mean."

"You still can eat curry at the last position~."

"Eh? Seriously!? Fine by me!"

Repelling everyone's "Are you really!?" punchline, Toori posed a question to Shirojiro.

"Well I'll bite. How're we going to hold a special student general meeting while Seijun's still here?"

"You heard it before, didn't you? A special student general meeting held with Seijun still here can only mean one thing. That is... A vote of no confidence towards the one who holds authority (Masazumi). Having ambitions being from a political family, she should experience this at least once."

Ignoring everyone's face glued to him, Shirojiro let out a small laugh from his nose.

"If Masazumi doesn't come, she'll be removed from being Vice President and we'll be able to have the original special student general meeting. If she does, the 'special' part will be omitted and it'll become an official student general

meeting. It'll be more interesting if she does. Many things will move and become money after all."

"I see," Toori said. Still half-naked, he raised his right hand with a serious face.

"...But it's quite hard to get a gag in here, isn't it? It's too hard."

Everyone ignored him. Toori peeked frantically at the seats to his left and right, and finally...

"Wait, are you guys ignoring me...?"

Then, for some reason, he dropped all the way to his seat and laid face down on the teacher's desk. Eventually he bent forward and started wiggling, Shirojiro looking at him.

"Everyone, just take it in. Miss Oriotorai will clean the idiot up afterwards, so don't worry about him."

"Shiro-kun? It looks like she won't wait that long."

The students of 3-Bamboo and the teacher, Sanyou, experienced it for the third time today.

"That was quick! That's too quick, sensei! Ah, ow ow ow, my arms don't bend that way..."

"Ah, Sanyou? A push, it's a push!!"

Covering up the newly-made hole, Shirojiro drew a breath and looked over at everyone.

Furthermore, he only took a single glance at the figure of Toori on the teacher's desk, wrapped in curtain from his feet all the way to his head, before ignoring him.

"Now then, everyone-..."

"Hey! He~y! Are you ignoring me!? It's not every day you see someone rolling himself up in a curtain on the teacher's desk, you know!? I'm doing a pretty good job at looking like a white pea pod, am I not?"

Continuing his ignoring, Shirojiro looked at everyone.

With the preface “See here?” that he’d repeated a number of times today, Erimaki (still on top of Heidi’s head) clapped its hands and brought out a sign frame onto midair. Displayed on it were rows of text. The verse where the scrolling stopped was...

“According to the Academy rules, where certain conditions such as the deficiency of a leader are met, students will be able to hold a special student general meeting during a crisis that threatens the Academy; the opinion the meeting decides on will become representative of the whole student body. ... Losing the Chancellor’s Officers and the Student Council, we are essentially staging something like an appeal or a coup d’etat over the whole academy grounds.”

Then Shirojiro said, while stealing a glance at Toori over at the teacher’s desk: “If we hold a special student general meeting and call Masazumi over to us, we will be able to decide. We’ll be able to decide what happens to Horizon, Musashi and the Far East, as well as our own selves. Everyone, get in touch with the people you care about and be prepared for when the time comes. Whatever the case, we students are a main part of this world; they are going to be dragged into whatever decision we make after all.”

“...What about the opinions of the other classes, Shiro-kun?”

“I’ve already sent out mail to them as a representative committee member. Did you think I was not doing anything all this time? And the majority of the replies were ‘I don’t know what to do so let me hear your story.’ Do you understand? Even with the pressure the Testament Union is putting on us, we are still in a position where we cannot avoid the possibility of hesitation.”

After that...

“The guard unit, then. The people in charge nearby would surely need to hear our story. Honda Futayo is escorting King Yoshinao over at Musashino after all. Being the vice commanding officer of her Academy, her unit consists of about 150 people, I assume.”

“Will it be bad if we don’t tell them, Shiro-kun?”

“They are about the only combat unit we have in the Far East. If we are to deal with the Testament Union after this, their power would most definitely be needed. Also, they are well aware of the might of each country, so they are torn between the Union and the Far East. There is a need to understand, and again, because of this the situation calls us to get our intentions through to them. That’s why we should get them to understand and, while we still can, get them over to our side so that it’ll be easier on us after.”

Saying that, Shirojiro let out a breath.

Then, looking at Toori’s still rolled-up figure on the teacher’s desk said.

“Hey, I’m done, idiot. Say something interesting. Something profitable would be better.”

Toori laid his rolled-up figure sideways, and bent backwards.

“Gyo~u~za!”

The students of 3-Bamboo and Sanyou experienced it for the fourth time that day.

“W-wait, sensei, it’s not my fault, you’re just passing off harsh judgement on my gag, aren’t you!! Ah, wai-... it’s stuck, ua, no, don’t pull the gyozu~!”

“Aah, seriously, that was so cheap I could not contain myself! Ah, Sanyou? In other words, a push!!”

In a white room, a voice leaked out.

“I would not expect these to properly answer your request, but...”

These were the words of a female student, her uniform in red, holding several volumes of books under her arm.

At the end of her gaze, the white-haired automaton seated on a chair responded.

“Judge, it is fine. To be honest, Horizon can conclude that I do not myself have much of the experience of reading, after all. Either of them will exceed

Horizon's expectations, thus I can conclude."

"Is that so," the student spoke while approaching Horizon with the books in her arm.

"Ah."

She realized that there was nowhere to place the books in the room.

Horizon noticed the confusion of the female student.

"Judge. Here."

She stood up and left the chair open.

The student went over to her side and placed the books on top of the chair. Still...

"Um, Horizon-sama, you..."

Without answering, Horizon took one of the volumes in her hand and...

"Thinking back, Horizon was always like this."

With those words, Horizon sat down beside the wall. Then, with a broken sitting posture, she laid down the book on her lap and opened it with her two hands. Looking at the figure of the doll drawing her gaze to the opened book in that position, the female student panicked, and then...

"N-no, please, I'll immediately get a chair..."

"I heard that bringing things into this place is quite hard. I would gather that even clearing a book to be brought here would have taken some effort. Also this is Horizon's usual reading posture in a room, so I'd ask you not to mind."

The female student, a little lost, alternated her gaze between Horizon and the entrance without a handle. But, with her gaze quickly turned to the book, Horizon said...

"What kind of things are in the contents of this book, I wonder."

"Ah, tes. I have asked Musashi about the good-selling and popular books; there are about ten books, which I have divided into genres. It seems that some of them were censored, but the ones cut out are stuff that would promote feelings of resistance or weaken one's resolve..."

Stopping her words, the female student made a sound gulping her throat, and...

“Anyway, things like those won’t be in there. So as to remove any dangerous things or wards inside them, they have been selected from those sold at the stores and checked by the higher people for safety.”

“Judge, thank you. Also...”

Turning her gaze from the book to the female student, Horizon held the collar of the white clothes she wore and showed it to her. Those were provided by Tres España, but...

“Horizon would like to have my clothes, please.”

“That is...”

The student lowered her eyebrows.

“Those are the clothes of a citizen. For the lord of a country...”

“Those were the clothes Horizon chose. Horizon was aware of my duty to find out who I am, but before that, I myself was the one who chose those clothes. I can conclude that those clothes are appropriate for myself, so if it’s possible, I’d like to wear them, please.”

To those words, the female student let several seconds pass.

After a while...

“Tes. I’ll bring them over after they are cleaned. Tres España uses an Osman-originated cleaning technique so the clothes will become like new.”

“Judge. Thank you.”

Horizon gave a sign of gratitude. Returning the greeting, the student went back to silence. Thus, Horizon said: “Is anything wrong?”

“Ah, no. ...About the thing before. If Horizon-sama, were to wish to be saved, a hypothetical situation, so to say...”

“Judge, whatever the case, Horizon is only following the best decision. If Horizon were to understand her desire to be rescued or anything...”

I wonder.

“I would gather that the person to do so will give up.”

“? ...W-why is that?”

“The decisions of an automaton are perfect. That person would surely bring the words meant to save Horizon, but... I wonder if he'll be able to keep up with all of my refutations?”

“Refutations...?”

“Parallel conversations. Horizon would surely come to an understanding with that person, but until that moment, will he be able to separate the boundary between us that is the perfect judgement, I wonder.”

Saying that, Horizon realized one thing.

“It's just like Horizon wants to be saved. Whether I want to or not, that decision lies under my perfect judgement. Even so, whether I would wish for such a thing or not; right now I do not know. It's just that...”

The female student in front of her did not say anything. As if to conclude, Horizon continued.

“When Horizon heard of her origins, only one thing was clear in my thoughts: if it was possible, instead of a monarch or whatever...it would have been better if I was an employee in a cafe.”

To her words, the student hardened her body.

“ ... ”

At a loss for words, she only stood still.

Horizon could not understand the meaning behind the girl's silence. She thought of inquiring, but at that moment, a dull sound started to echo.

“If I may ask, was that a ship?”

“Ah, tes, the ship modified to house the refugees of Mikawa has started to head towards Musashi. They were going to obtain water and ether fuel supplies, but that would probably take until close to night time to complete.”

“Judge. I believe that Horizon will no longer be around at that time, so I wouldn't expect to see those people safe and sound.”

“...Ah, I-I’m sorry.”

Horizon tilted her head. She only meant to speak the truth, but something must have probably gone wrong.

She looked up at the colored ceiling.

“Whatever the case...”

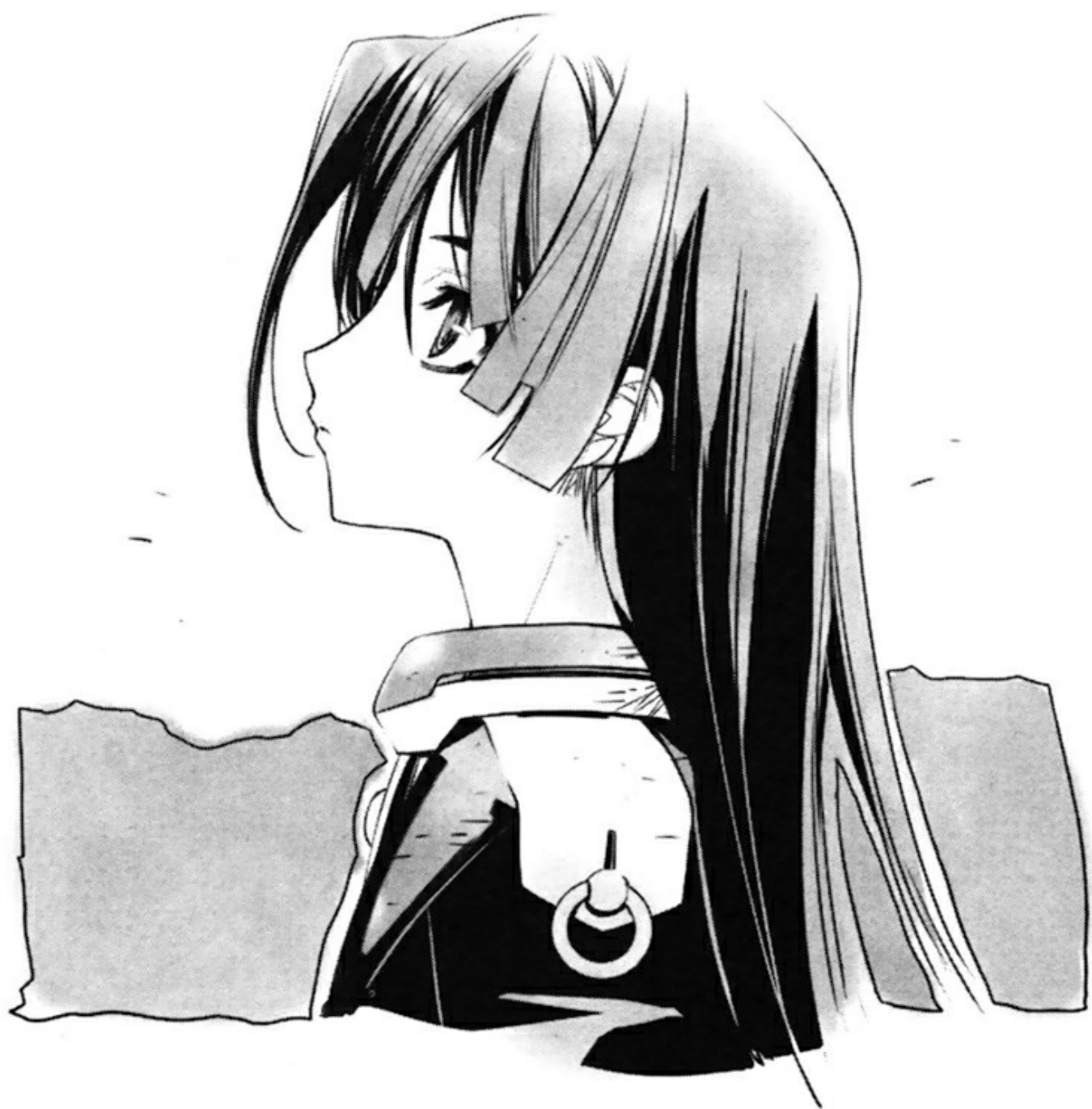
She murmured.

“I will never get to meet all the various people at the store again, will I?”

Chapter 26: Refuter at the Execution Grounds

CHAPTER 26

"Refuter at the Execution Grounds"



Even with something thought up
Feeling the wellness of a meal is
Is it due to the quiescence of the meal
One can ponder in?

Point Allocation (Excuse)

Even with something thought up

Feeling the wellness of a meal is

Is it due to the quiescence of the meal

One can ponder in?

Point Allocation (Excuse)

In a dimly-lit room.

The entrance was open, but the windows of the cafe remained closed by curtains.

The bread stand over at the entrance had none to sell, with only two figures seen inside the store.

One of them, long-haired and in a male school uniform, was seated at the table in the middle of eating; the other was a woman standing in front of a pot in her kitchen, humming.

Stopping her light stirring of the pot with a large spoon...

“Masazumi-san, is it alright for you not to go to the Academy?”

In response, Masazumi paused in cutting up her bread and peeked into the kitchen.

“The people at the Provisional Council would rather not have me go there for now.”

“They’re keeping you close, huh?”

Masazumi swallowed her answer “Is that so?” back down her throat.

Then she continued to cut up the bread, put it in her mouth and washed it down her throat with water.

“Well, it seems like the parliament will finalize their decision regarding our course of action in the afternoon, so I’ll bring the results over to the Academy when they come out. Maybe...”

Masazumi thought about the story she heard from her father’s secretary this

morning, in the Provisional Council building's lobby.

"In order for Musashi to properly obey the Testament Union, they will have the powerless Academy follow the decisions of the King and the parliament."

What unpleasant directions.

...Recognizing Princess Horizon's suicide and transferring Musashi, huh...

Neither her classmates nor her juniors would just sit there and obediently follow that course of action. Even if they did, it would not be with genuine intentions.

Still, without any power over at the Academy, they will have no choice but to listen to this side.

I don't like this, Masazumi thought.

However, Masazumi already knew of her standing in relation to Musashi from when she was at the parliament building.

Under the Academy rules, the only one that can go against a student is another student, basically. Because pretty much all the student authorities on Musashi's side were in the hands of the King, she was to represent the parliament and negotiate with the Testament Union.

She thought that it would be her time to come out, but the motives of the parliament as well as those of K.P.A. Italia made her hesitate.

Fearing the possibility that she would uphold her rights and speak for the students' side becoming reality, their logic was probably to keep the parliament close to the Testament Union's side through K.P.A. Italia and have her speak for them.

Being unable to face the students, the parliament could not come to a decision; in the end, it seemed that they will follow the Union after all.

According to the secretaries... If we were to oppose them, in the worst case, we would be at all-out war with the Testament Union.

She understood what that meant. That was why, even for Masazumi, she could sense the meaning in going to the Academy in the afternoon to carry out her thankless role.

“Still, at these times...”

She let a question slip.

“If it were Aoi and the other guys, what would they do? I’m not familiar with how things go here, after all.”

“Masazumi-san, girls hide a lot of things, so thinking about your position makes you think about a lot of other things, doesn’t it?”

But the female shopkeeper’s words continued piling up.

“Well, they are idiots after all; so they’ll immediately do what they are thinking of.”

Masazumi wondered at those words, but then quickly agreed.

Not even paying for what happened last night; their way of living has always been like that.

It was during last year’s swimming class, wasn’t it?

While the girls were changing, Aoi walked triumphantly along the poolside, directly opened the girls’ changing room and went, “Oh my, is this the girls’ changing room? I didn’t know!”

She seriously questioned his motive; what would he be doing if not peeking? Still, why the girls would then bring out their weapons and fire back at the same time was never known; she was only glad her group was out on a trip.

Thinking about the other things they did in the past, which she had heard about from the other committee members; like the library archived erotic literature lineup incident, the biological laboratory flask brewing incident, and the tentacle-type greenery project on the roof...

...Rather than doing what they are thinking of, they’re more of the instinctive type.

Still, Masazumi thought. From last night until now, even as we speak...

“Only Aoi would think about saving her, wouldn’t he...?”

“...Horizon?”

“Judge,” Masazumi replied, thinking about how hard it became to talk about

her after just one day.

“Shopkeeper, did you... You knew about her past, didn’t you?”

“Huh? Why would you think that?”

“Yesterday, I heard about how Aoi and his sister would always come to meet the girl around here.”

“Ah, I see,” a voice was heard from inside the kitchen.

“I see; Horizon was a good girl, wasn’t she? Still, it’s probably because I’m not that sensible in dealing with people, huh. Just maybe, I thought, the automaton that has always been beside me is that girl. ...But my doubts were stronger, I guess. That’s just how adults think, huh.”

“I wouldn’t know about Aoi, but the others didn’t seem to hold that thought after all. Besides... Without memories, without anything, I’d think that she might as well be a different person.”

“Masazumi-san is kind, aren’t you?”

With a voice that held no sarcasm, a breath was heard.

“In truth, there would be one thing I would say to you, Masazumi-san. Why didn’t you save that girl that night, or something like that. The me in the old days would have immediately lashed out at you.

“But now, the helplessness at the thought of her becoming a monarch came first, huh. There’s a trend of people of higher positions existing only to cut their stomachs in these times, after all. I must be getting old.”

“...”

After a short while in silence, along with a sigh that resembled a little smile, the female shopkeeper spoke up.

“Horizon, you know?” she began, using that person’s old name.

“That girl had a lot of complications surrounding her. She was a child born between Lord Motonobu and a different person. I don’t know more than that, only that she was living on Musashi along with her mother. Her mother was a person with quite the good mind. ...Well, she died when Horizon was five years

old.”

“...She died?”

“Judge,” the shopkeeper stated from the kitchen.

“I didn’t know the details because I wasn’t around here then. Still, because of that it became easy for Lord Motonobu to be recognized. There was the suicide of his younger brother as well...”

“No way...”

Masazumi listened to the shopkeeper’s words.

“According to the rumors, when Horizon died ten years ago in the Remorse Way, Lord Motonobu was apparently starting to go about the proceedings of having his legitimate child succeed him. If that was the case, this would be the second time for Toori; losing Horizon as the legitimate child of Lord Motonobu, that is.”

“...”

Masazumi was in silence.

A lot of things were on her mind. About this case, especially about Horizon Ariadust; she was thinking about whether or not she could be saved.

Still, the key to securing the safety of the people lay in her suicide, as well as the subsequent transfer of Musashi.

In politics, one was to cast aside his own feelings and work to secure the decisions that would most benefit the public.

From that standpoint, the choice was clear. Choosing the best compromise of recognizing Horizon’s death and transferring Musashi, she would then promise the safety of the people that would become its residents.

That was the best decision. Still...

...That idiot would think otherwise.

She remembered Aoi from last night. What was he trying to say at that time?

.../-...

I wonder. She felt like hearing it as well.

Of course, that chance has long passed on. She will die at six in the evening after all.

...I want to save her, but...

At the same time as that thought, Masazumi heard a sound.

A bell rang from inside the pocket binder on her hips. It was a cheap handheld for formal business use, but it was notifying her of an incoming call. Holding it in her hand and looking, the caller was...

“...Masazumi. It’s me.”

Her father.

Without even waiting for a reply, he said this:

“Right now, on the messageboards, it has been reported that the students at the Musashi Ariadust Academy are planning to raise an opposition.”

“...Opposition? Shouldn’t Musashi’s side be unable to carry out such a thing?”

“It’s a special student general meeting. They are planning to vote for no confidence in you.”

“If they were to do that...”

Musashi would take matters into their own hands.

The matter of saving Horizon or not.

If they were to decide to save Horizon...

...We will be in conflict with the Testament Union. At worst, we’ll be at all-out war with them, you know...?

If they save Horizon, the Far East will come to possess a Logismoι Óplo; furthermore, the responsibility for Mikawa’s destruction will not be taken. The act of ignoring both the nationwide rule and the Union’s directions will surely become a just cause for them to declare war, and the presence of the Logismoι Óplo in Musashi’s hands as well as their spells and trading power would become a worthy enough incentive for the other countries.

It would not be surprising for the world to become the enemy.

...No way...

Masazumi reached for the inside of her pocket binder. She felt the memo, the piece of paper that contained all her thoughts in writing in case she was to oppose the Testament Union, in that place.

“Opposing the Testament Union is no more than a childish thought.”

It definitely would be; thus Masazumi gripped the piece of paper inside the pocket binder in her hands.

Closing her eyes, she crushed the paper as if kneading it, then leaked a breath.

“So you want me to go...and persuade them out of that, is it?”

“Judge. Right now, using the library as the meeting room, the vice commander of the Guard Unit is having a meeting as the representative of the students left behind. In short, the problem here is the situation. Do not do anything that will become a problem in the future. Go.”

To that one sentence, Masazumi’s body shivered.

The words continued.

“You understand your duty, no? To negotiate. You have already been informed about our intentions from the secretaries, so go.”

Is this the first time since coming to Musashi that her father has placed any expectation on her? Or is she just carrying out her responsibility?

Before she could know, after the next few words from her father the line was cut.

“Go on. Negotiate with everyone so that Musashi will receive the greatest benefit.”

There were several figures in the library, located on the starboard (right relative to the ship front) of the front building of the Musashi Ariadust Academy.

They were in the space inside. The self-study tables were moved aside, and chairs were prepared.

Seated by the window were students who had medium-grade armor on top of their school uniforms. They were the Far East's Guard Unit.

Behind the seat in which the well-built vice commander sat were a female student and a slender-built male student.

On the other side, by the corridor, were Shirojiro and Neshinbara in their school uniforms.

The one in the center of the room, acting as a witness, was...

"Umm, I myself don't know why I am here, but I'm Sanyou..."

Sanyou looked forward. Directly in front of the library was the broadcasting committee. Supporting their communicative electronics which would become their recording equipment, they gave the OK sign to everyone.

They were on air.

As if to follow through, Shirojiro first opened his mouth.

"Well then; right now, we have here with us the vice commander of the guard unit which is entrusted with the role of protecting Musashi, but..."

"You should cancel this proposal of opening the special student general meeting immediately."

The vice commander faced towards Shirojiro and Neshinbara and showed a slouching posture.

"I understand what you want to say. That's why I came here as soon as I could. The conversations your class had before have also been reported to me."

"What do you think? And please don't make it unprofitable."

"Judge, this is what I think. I know what you people are aiming for. Still, if we're going to collide with the Testament Union, the worst case scenario will lead to all-out war with them and the control of the whole of the Far East will be affected."

It was not a scream of anger, rather just a clear, straightforward manner of

speech.

“Our chief commander, who was taught by the strongest of the East, Honda Tadakatsu, and is practically the strongest among us, could not even win against an injured opponent. Furthermore, the other side has numerous kinds of weaponry, and there is no age restriction on their students. We will surely lose if we fight.”

He stated.

“We are people who know that we cannot win. You people would not understand that. That is why I challenge you; if you care about Musashi and the Far East...you should cast aside all your recklessness.”

“Judge. Then that makes it easy. As one that goes by the rules of negotiation, I will say this.”

Lightly sitting down on his seat, with yet another straightforward tone of expression, he said.

“Vice commander, if I may. We still do not possess the material that would determine whether or not we will lose to the Union. Therefore, vice commander, we cannot include your opinion in our consideration. And I know that our making our own decisions is because of the need to resolve this situation.”

That’s why...

“We will open the special student general meeting.”

“What an outrageous thing...!”

The vice commander raised his voice. Opening his right hand as if to hold it out, he turned to face Shirojiro.

“If you could not even win against us, what could you do to the opponent with their resources!? Is it not clear that you will lose!?”

“Then let’s ascertain what we do not have, right here on the negotiation table.”

Shirojiro let a moment pass, then quietly said.

“What power do your forces have, on the negotiation table you call the battlefield?”

“That is...”

“The best merchandise you have is your leader. Is that right?”

But...

“Is that product, truly, the best you have?”

The female member of the force standing behind the vice commander leaned forward and spoke up.

“The commander’s trump card is her speed; it was the best we had in that situation. Still, Garcia, who should not have recovered from his injury... Tachibana Muneshige exceeded it.”

She showed a hint of shame while speaking.

“I will say that fighting speed plays a big role in hand-to-hand combat. His exceeding her speed meant that he was an opponent who would easily have her back wide open.”

“Judge.”

Shirojiro nodded.

“Then, what if...the commander uses a weapon?”

“That is...”

Before the female member could say anything, the vice commander held his right hand up to stop her before slowly putting down the hand.

“This is just an assumption, but she will still not win.”

“Why?”

“In regards to her weapons, the strongest she has would be the one Tadakatsu-sama used: the Divine Weapon, Tonbokiri. However, when they fought last night, with Tadakatsu-sama using that weapon, Garcia returned alive.”

“So you’re saying that it is impossible for his daughter at her present level to catch up to him?”

To that question, the vice commander did not immediately respond. Finally, drawing a breath...

“If it’s to persuade you people, I will say this: Judge.”

“Then, what if you guys back her up?”

“— —”

At Shirojiro’s words, the vice commander paused his breath. Still, after a while...

“That would be an act of foul play. ...The warriors of the Far East will not accept that.”

Of course, Neshinbara nodded.

Not affected by everyone’s gazes, he brought out his Mouse and a sign frame. On top of that...

“But, you see? That was how it was during the period of the Kamakura’s shogunate. There’s still the custom of introducing yourself on the battlefield, but mostly in melee fights. Still, there was a breakthrough in spell research by those with Lord Masashige during the recreation of the Mongolian Invasion and the Onin War which led to the use of long range weaponry right now. P.A. Oda has made a shooting force, and King Gustav of Sweden has used the same tactics to improve his fighting force, no?”

Then...

“King Gustav died on the battlefield from a stray bullet. Right now, a battlefield where a king fighting a melee battle could by chance die by the actions of a soldier is the latest development. Why would you people not jump on that development as well?”

“Wait.”

The vice commander turned his body away. Turning his neck a little to the side, he moved his gaze from Neshinbara to Shirojiro.

“To bring up other countries like P.A. Oda and Sweden would be...”

“You are misunderstanding us.”

Shirojiro leaned his body forward. He placed his elbow on his lap to support his body.

As if to peek into him, he looked upwards at the vice commander.

“If we were to go at all-out war with the Tsirhc-type Divine States, we should also consider the possibility of fighting other influential forces like P.A. Oda. In the worst case scenario, the whole world will become our enemy. The reason would be Lord Motonobu’s words last night... Do you remember them?”

“If all the Logismoi Óplo are obtained, one will gain the power to interfere with the Apocalypse, huh...”

“Do you understand?”

Shirojiro said.

“The Logismoi Óplo are not simply ‘gathered’; Lord Motonobu precisely stated their being ‘obtained’. If I were to speak from a business standpoint, the countries will not assemble the Logismoi Óplo together to face their crisis; it will be an arms race among them for those armaments. ...There must be someone to possess all of them, after all.”

Then...

“The Far East will be engulfed in a global-scale war before long.”

Shirojiro looked at the vice commander and the two people behind him.

The vice commander was staying still, looking his way. He intended to listen to the end of the story and decide everything. However, as if to cease their breaths, the two people hardened their bodies and looked in this direction.

...Well, for the most part, everyone should have known that we’ll be talking about this.

Even more, as a military organization the guard unit should have already confirmed such a thing.

That's why they wouldn't be so easily agitated by this conversation.

Precisely because of this, Shirojiro thought of them as valuable people.

...If they were to become our allies, that would be because they have understood everything and chose to take our side. A partner who understands the circumstances and shares his agreement is the most reliable thing a businessman can have.

Shirojiro continued.

"According to the Testament, the whole of Europe will soon be caught in the Thirty Years' War; the Osman in the Middle East will make advancements toward Europe and India, the Qing will rise in power in Central and Russia will begin their expedition. And finally, for the Far East... The Unification War between the Oda, Hashiba and Matsudaira will occur."

Do you understand? Shirojiro said.

"The incentive to scramble for the Logismoí Óplo is already present. The greatest cause: 'Adhering to the Testament, going to war under the premise of history recreation.' For all the countries, the course of the Far East's recreation of history would be an unwanted hindrance to their own activities. That's why..."

"Having Princess Horizon commit suicide here... The Testament Union will usurp the rights of the Far East, is it?"

"That's right," Shirojiro answered.

"P.A. Oda has already used the Hashiba and taken control of M.H.R.R. from the Far East's perspective. The M.H.R.R.-Hashiba allied forces will mobilize their upcoming joint European-Far Eastern campaign under the premise of the Thirty Years' War.

"The Hashiba are P.A. Oda, but in order for M.H.R.R. to cooperate with them they will ignore the influence of the Mlasi and recognize the Tsirhc Testaments. However, the Union's forces in Europe will not be able to avoid having to concentrate their forces to repel the invasion of the Hashiba under the rule of the Mlasi Testament driven P.A. Oda; and the very people that will bring the collapse of the Hashiba are the Matsudaira. In order to earn their right to cause

such a thing, the Union would most definitely want to take control of the Far East and completely secure all the rights of the Matsudaira.”

A moment passed.

“They will use those battles as a premise to start the arms race for the Logismoi Óplo. That’s why...”

“We should, as the Far East, secure Princess Horizon as a Logismoi Óplo?”

“Why would you think that?”

Shirojiro posed the question, to which the vice commander immediately replied.

“That is exactly what the Testament Union is planning to do. If Princess Horizon does not commit suicide, the Logismoi Óplo along with the Matsudaira clan will remain with the Far East and we will become the deciding factor against P.A. Oda and the Apocalypse. These two potential factors...the casting vote for the fate of this world will be in the hands of the Far East.”

Still, turning his neck to the side the vice commander said.

“...How idealistic.”

Saying that, the vice commander turned again, as if to shake something off.

Furthermore, he slowly posed a question to Shirojiro.

“What do you plan to do? The possibility of all-out war with the Testament Union, Musashi’s finances and management were that to happen, the safety of the people...there will be countless problems. Even to secure Princess Horizon as a Logismoi Óplo, there must be a reason in itself for us to stop her suicide.”

“In order for us to obtain the answer to everything...we require your cooperation.”

“Why?”

To that question, Shirojiro affirmed from the bottom of his heart.

...Finally, the negotiations have begun.

The other party has inquired about the need for their cooperation.

...If we can agree on a reason for their cooperation under these circumstances, they will respond.

This is a business transaction.

Right now, the Far East is approaching two roads: to move forward and crash, or to stop and sink.

If we stop, until we sink we will enjoy a period of safety. However, if we move forward, what will happen after we crash, we will never know.

That was the reason for their inquiry. They wanted us to show the reason we could still protect our safety even after we move forward and crash.

Shirojiro leaned his body forward.

“The only one that can face a student is another. Thus, the Provisional Council and king are sending the only one among us with authority, the Vice President, over to us to act in their place. That very person is associated with the Provisional Council, but...her political skills are most likely the best among us students.”

“That Vice President...Honda Masazumi, is it?”

“...Do you know her?”

“Yeah,” the vice commander nodded, putting his hands deeply together.

“She was always the best in ancient Japanese literature and culture when she was enrolled in Mikawa.”

“Not surprising,” Shirojiro returned in affirmation. Furthermore, pointing to the floor that is this Academy...

“We are planning to do something to get that person over to our side. She will then act as a representative of the students...”

“A representative?”

“And face the Testament Union.”

Shirojiro leaked out a sigh. He was more aware of the recording equipment the broadcasting committee held than the vice commander in front of him.

It'd be for the best that our voices reach the people listening to the broadcast,

he thought.

“The vice president is, right now, under the control of the king and Provisional Council associated with the Testament Union. However, we also know that that itself is the weak point of the Union’s side. That’s why if we were to face the Vice President and pull her over to our side...”

The people listening to the broadcast in their houses and on the roads all over Musashi, thus heard the next few words.

“...We would have among us the person that will be able to overthrow the Testament Union’s excuses.”

Do you understand?

“If justice lies absolute on the other side, the vice president will just defeat us in our special student general meeting and everything will end. However, if we were to win against the vice president...we would also have a chance to defeat the Testament Union.”

Shirojiro said, while pointing to Neshinbara at his back:

“Neshinbara over here is an expert in historical knowledge. I myself am part of the management for Musashi’s Trading Party, and I have connections with IZUMO. If we include the political aspect of the vice president, it will be possible for us to consider most of the problem. With only that capability along with Horizon’s rescue, it will be good enough if we can obtain what we wish for in the conclusions we make dealing with the aftermath. If that cannot be done...”

He raised up his body and shrugged his shoulders.

“You can hang both me and Neshinbara here by the neck. That will probably be how the Provisional Council and the king will handle this ‘internal problem of Musashi’ after all. ...It will be enough for you guys to protect the residents of Musashi in the wars that will come and the collapse of the Far East, even if just a little bit.”

“In other words...your conclusion is that this matter will not be settled here,

but when you face off with the Provisional Council and king via the vice president? That if you were to pass the confrontation with the vice president acting in the Testament Union's place, you would obtain a just cause to save Princess Horizon?"

"Judge."

Shirojiro nodded.

"Right now, the parliament and king are doing no more than slowly closing the store even if they are acting in the safest intent. In contrast, what we wish for is to look for the possibility for the store to continue to be open."

I am a trader after all, so I am aware of the existence of the borderline between the possible and the impossible.

"If the consequences of our actions outweigh their benefits in our confrontation with the Provisional Council and king, we will not follow through with them. If that time comes, I will have shown no business insight as a trader; so I won't mind even if you slip the noose onto my neck."

Shirojiro said this, and the three people in front of them affirmed.

"No, you mustn't!"

A voice. The sharp feminine voice came from inside the room.

As Shirojiro turned to look, in front of the blackboard on the teacher's seat he saw Sanyou, eyebrows high on her reddened face as she raised her shoulders.

"...What you've been saying before, h-hanging yourself is not something you can say lightly!"

Sanyou's raised voice reached her own ears, and she realized she was screaming.

...Ah.

Now I've done it, she thought.

Staff must not be involved in students' disputes. That was determined according to the Academy rules. Still...

...Just now was different. That was not a dispute, but a mistake in principle.

Thinking that, she recovered from her drop.

...I must not panic.

I must calm down, Sanyou thought while looking at Shirojiro and Neshinbara.

“Being fine with dying for the sake of your actions...did Makiko-senpai teach you that way of life? Her usually thrashing the streets and running around inside the school, from morning to after class, even having dangerous discussions like ‘Today’s topic will be overthrowing the nation~!’ with a voice loud enough to surprise me in the other classroom; all of that wasn’t for you to die, but for you to live on, wasn’t it!?”

That’s why...

“I-I don’t mind, whatever you are planning to do. In conflicts between you students...we teachers cannot say anything. However, what we are teaching you are the things you need in order for you to live on. If you could say that it’s fine to die...just what have we taught you? Just what have you learned, coming here? I do not remember saying that we live only to prepare for death!”

Haa, Sanyou sighed after yelling.

She lowered her hips, which had raised from the chair without her realizing.

“Ah.”

While arranging her disheveled hair back to her cheeks, tears fell from the corners of her eyes.

I mustn’t, Sanyou thought, wiping them with her sleeve.

I must not cry. That is not what adults do.

As a teacher, as a person who teaches what is needed to live, what I should say now is...

...I wonder what?

She didn’t know. She didn’t know what to say here herself. It was her third year as a teacher; she was still lacking experience. She couldn’t drive home the point like Oriotorai could.

Still, she murmured, wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

“If...”

She drew a breath. Her shoulders twitched once, breathing out.

“If you are students of mine or Makiko-senpai’s...”

Sanyou thought about everyone’s future. Their course of life and how they will live.

It’ll be fine if there are lots of fun things, she thought. There will be bad things, but it’ll be fine as long as we can find more good than bad things. Whether it would be careers or wealth, that is a different story.

“Looking up at the sky, thinking about what will happen to the world, listening to a song, reading a book and having your heart moved, raising your money and buying things, properly greeting people in your part-time jobs... Thinking that tomorrow will be the same, but looking out at night, the lights by the window reminding you of someone. Continuing to do things like these is the least I want out of you.”

She didn’t expect to be able to teach people how to live well. There is only one thing she teaches them to be aware of. That is...

“For that sake as well...to not die. For you to absolutely not cause your own death. ...Please remember that.”

Stating that, Sanyou let out a breath.

What she expressed, she herself didn’t quite understand. What she knew didn’t quite replace the importance of studies and future plans, but just to be able to think about that a little...

Realizing the sleeve she wiped her tears with had dried, Sanyou raised her head.

In front of her were Shirojiro, Neshinbara, the vice commander and the two people in the corridor.

None of them were looking in her direction.

“Ah...”

Now I've done it, she thought in her heart as she looked down. She must have selfishly cut them off and gone off about unpleasant things.

Therefore, Sanyou straightened her seat looking away from everyone.

“U-umm, sensei really is interrupting everyone...”

But the moment she tried to walk away...

“If that's the case...”

The slender-built male member behind the vice commander spoke in a small voice.

“...What of Princess Horizon, whose desire for her own death is required of her?”

“——”

At the end of his gaze, lost for words, Neshinbara nodded.

He didn't return the gaze; but, showing a smile on this face, said:

“At least...it conflicts with the teachings of the Musashi Ariadust Academy, does it not?”

Judge, everyone in that place affirmed.

“She is not a student of our Academy. She is not required to follow the policy of our Academy, but...”

Shirojiro said; and as if to respond, Neshinbara continued.

“Then, we can think of this as the Testament Union taking away the princess from us without any education, no? It may just be an accusation, but...”

Shirojiro and the vice commander acted to substitute the last word.

“However...”

Both of them stood up. Shirojiro took one step forward.

“...the princess may not know about all her possibilities. At the very least, she does not know of ‘the least’ that we should.

“How about it, guard unit? In order to save the princess...would you not consider finding out about the many more possibilities we could have?”

“How unfair.”

With a small laugh, the vice commander took a step forward as if to respond to Shirojiro.

“Borrowing the power of a staff member at the very end, I mean.”

“It was free, you know? The people at this Academy must not have that good of a business sense.”

“Judge,” the vice commander nodded, shaking his shoulders.

“We will make sure of your reliability until the end of your confrontation with the vice president. If we can find out about what is best for the Far East and Musashi, then there would have been worth in doing so. Of course, if you are able to win the argument against the vice president, that is. Still, if that cannot be done...”

The vice commander held his hand out to Shirojiro.

“I will at least prostate with you in front of the Provisional Council and king, begging to be pardoned from hanging. Trusting a businessman with no business sense would be my mistake as well, after all.”

To those words, Shirojiro nodded and returned the handshake.

That moment, a member of the guard unit opened a window from the outside and leaned in. With a ragged voice, he said: “Vice commander! ...The vice president of Ariadust is heading in our direction!”

“Oh,” the vice commander raised his voice.

However, that wasn’t the only thing the voice expressed.

“Others... Two people are converging to meet at that place as well! The details are jumbled up, but both of them seem to be people with influence on the Musashi!”

“People with influence?”

At the vice commander’s words, Neshinbara made a hardened face.

“Woah...those two are meeting up with Honda-kun, huh?”

“Those two...?”

“Judge,” Neshibara murmured.

“...The highest two in rank; the strongest two people in our Academy.”

Masazumi was quickly walking down a path where no figures could be seen.

The sunlight on her back indicated that it was almost noon. However, neither the sound of cooking nor the sight of people passing by on the road were there. The only movement, that was to say, was the preparation for the arrival of Mikawa’s refugee ship; and, as if in response, the separation of a passenger ship from the Musashi. However...

...Will those people without the status of residency here be left in the care of the Testament Union?

On both the left and right second ships, as well as the front ship in the center, there were blocks for diplomatic or tourism use in every sector. Around those regions, people who could not become citizens of the Far East as well as those involved in diplomatic or trade relations were residing. However, even among them Catholics would be guaranteed safety by K.P.A. Italia or Tres España once they arrived at the land port.

The story about Musashi already being transferred to the Union had already spread among the people. Over on Musashi’s intranet which the shopkeeper had shown her, people were talking about nothing except that on the notice board and whatnot. Among those who were posting there seemed to be people sending various opinions flying at each other.

Right now, the people who weren’t residents had already perceived the notion that they could no longer continue to reside on the Musashi; and those whose safety has been guaranteed have started to evacuate.

...Seeing those people move out would likely have caused unrest among the people of Musashi.

Their neighbors were gone. That, along with the departure of ships, indicated

the continuing inclination among the people to escape.

The people will eventually see Musashi's transfer as an inevitable thing.

Thinking up until that moment, Masazumi...

"— —"

She turned her head to the side.

Isn't that fine? So she whispered in her heart, as if to persuade herself.

...That would be the best way to end this with minimum damage.

However, Masazumi thought.

"There will be those not going along with this, huh."

She was to go and persuade them. In other words, she was their enemy.

Thus she thought. At times a number of gazes were set on her figure, still quickly walking down the road.

Inside the stores of the shopping district. Through the gaps of the police station entrance. Behind the windows of the houses. She saw the people realizing her presence and looking at her.

Masazumi had neither the training nor the spells to read people's gazes. However, she felt the very meaning itself in the quiet, expressionless faces continuing to look at her.

She was holding a paper bag from the cafe on her side, but she thought of it as if it were a shield from them. As if to hold it out, showing that she was a resident of Musashi as well; as if to run away.

In front of her lay the natural park leading to the Remorse Way.

She went in.

At that moment.

On the roads to her left and right, there were figures converging to meet her.

Two of them. The first, coming from the right, was...

"Naomasa."

“Judge,” the girl said as she raised her right mechanical arm in greeting. Smoke rising from the tobacco pipe held in her mouth, the girl turned her gaze to the left while skipping over to this side.

“Oh, you’re with us as well, Mito?”

Turning her head as if to follow after that question, at the end of Masazumi’s glance over at the left side of the road was Mitotsudaira in her uniform, holding two long black leather cases on her back.

Looking over at Masazumi and Naomasa, she sighed.

“What do we have here? ...Are the representatives of Musashi’s knights, political group and the engineering club going to talk with everyone making noise at the Academy from now on?”

At the end of Masazumi’s glance, waving her silver hair, Mitotsudaira joined Masazumi’s quick walking with her own light steps.

...A knight from Hexagone Française, if I’m not mistaken. She’s from a werewolf family, huh.

As if to confirm her thoughts, the girl’s golden eyes turned to look at her with a look of discontent.

“The Musashi’s feudal lord group has shared our opinion of facing the side of the Academy. If the Provisional Council and king were to take care of this, ownership of the streets would be lost. However, we are not aware of the intentions of the Academy’s side. Therefore, being a student, I have come as a representative. For all the knights in Musashi.”

Is that so? Naomasa affirmed.

“The Engineering Club over here is the same as well. If Musashi’s transfer is confirmed, they will give all of us the sack after we’re done with the work, after all.”

“Is that the case? ...I was under the impression that you and the others will stay because they need engineers for the Musashi.”

That’s wrong, Masazumi thought. Then, as if to interpose between the two...

“The engineering club is essential to Musashi’s operation. If it’s left to the remnants of the Far East...there will be conflict in the future. That’s why, after their work is done, Musashi’s engineers will all be kicked out of the ship. That’s what the engineering club is thinking, no?”

To that question, Naomasa showed one reaction. She let out a long trail of smoke from her mouth with an expression indicating a smile on the tip of her mouth.

“You understand, don’t you? Masazumi. This is the first time we’ve talked, but you seem to know a lot. Well, at least you’d understand us lower classes better than the honorable knight over there.”

“Ah, even if you don’t understand us as well?”

To Mitotsudaira’s hurried words, Masazumi let out a small laugh.

“Mitotsudaira, you dislike noisy and intimate people, huh?”

To those casually uttered words, Mitotsudaira widened her eyes. Then, immediately turned to gaze at Masazumi with a pointed look.

“W-what are you saying? As if you know people’s preferences.”

“It’s just a guess. Whatever the case, in the case that Horizon Ariadust commits suicide, the head of the Matsudaira will be one of the Mito... In other words, it’ll be you, Mitotsudaira. Still, Horizon’s suicide has not yet been carried out and congratulating you for such a thing would not be appropriate here...but a part of the non-citizen population of traders and families should be able to remain on Musashi under your care.”

Mitotsudaira did not immediately respond to those words.

After she drew two breaths of air...

“In a Far East under complete rule of the Testament Union, something like the head of Matsudaira will be no more than a ‘yes man’ of a puppet, huh.”

Saying that, she touched her neck with her right hand.

Touching the red necklace resembling a choker adorned there...

“I am more fit for the country as a knight than a king, after all. I am here to

ascertain that.”

“Masazumi, don’t mind her. The wolf girl over there is just hiding her true feelings thinking that it’s cool.”

In response to Mitotsudaira raising her eyebrows, Naomasa only breathed out smoke through her mouth.

With those conversations, they entered the Remorse Way. Briefly thinking that the sky seen through the trees was blue, Masazumi spoke again.

“What’s wrong, you two?”

Those two were...

“Naomasa is the Sixth Special Duty of the Chancellor’s Officers. Mitotsudaira is the Fifth. ...From here on out, I am going to face off with your superior, the chancellor, as a representative of the Provisional Council and king. In other words, I am the enemy.”

“Still, I do think that our objectives match in general.”

Mitotsudaira said this in a quiet voice, combing her forelocks upward.

“Their course of action will very likely cause the Far East to plunge into war with the Testament Union. If that becomes the case, the knights and retainers enrolled in Ariadust Academy will have to fight to protect the people and land of Musashi.”

“So you want to avoid as much damage to the people as possible, is it?”

Judge, both Mitotsudaira and Naomasa nodded. First, Mitotsudaira said: “Going out and passing down the decision for that sake is my task.”

I see, Masazumi nodded, looking then to Naomasa on her right. Naomasa, receiving her glance, said “that’s right” and scratched her head with her mechanical right arm.

“For the engineering club, not transferring Musashi over to the Testament Union will keep our jobs stable. It’s just that we will have to fight the Union instead, in that case. Thus, I am here to ascertain whether we have the strength to rise up against the Union.”

“...In other words, both of you are concerned about power, huh.”

“Even for you, that would become quite the element in your decision; am I wrong? I mean, if you’re going to face the Testament Union, we will become part of your military strength as well.”

Is that so? Masazumi was going to say, but she panicked and changed her words.

“I am part of the Provisional Council. I don’t have a decision nor do I have anything else.”

Naomasa didn’t answer; she only breathed out smoke from her mouth. Then it felt like Mitotsudaira, on the back of her line of sight, drew a faint smile.

In front of them, the stairs leading to the Ariadust Academy could be seen.

On their left, near the end of the forest, was a small stone monument.

The girl whose slumber of death was memorialized by that monument was, right then, over by the execution grounds (Andamio de la Ejecución) a great distance behind them.

What will “become” of this? Masazumi thought, but she changed that line of thought.

...What will we “cause to occur,” huh? For me, for the others as well.

Then Masazumi saw it.

Up ahead, atop the stairs, there were four figures. The moment right after she ascertained this...

“——”

She, along with the other two, simultaneously halted their steps. Looking up the staircase from the end of Remorse Way, the four people could clearly be seen against the blue sky.

The first was Neshinbara.

The second and third were Heidi, standing by Shirojiro, and the last one was...

“...What’s with that lump of cloth that looks like Toori wrapped in curtain, you guys?”

“Aah,” Shirojiro said from on top of the stairs.

“This is...”

The bundle of cloth extended straight to both sides. Looking at the figure of what still looks like a rolled-up mat, Shirojiro slowly affirmed: “It’s a spring roll right now.”

Right after Shirojiro’s words, the spring roll moved.

At the end of Masazumi’s gaze, standing still at a loss for words, the spring roll panicked and twisted itself near its “neck” to one side. Then, the muffled voice coming from inside it.

“You’re wrong! It’s a sushi roll! The seaweed is rice paper because it’s white! You don’t understand, do you!?”

To that familiar voice, Masazumi turned to glance at both Naomasa and Mitotsudaira.

“That voice is...”

Those two people were already looking away for some reason at that moment.

...As I’d guessed.

While she was thinking that, the protesting sushi roll on top of the stairs leaned, then shook.

“Ah.”

The sushi roll tumbled down the stairs.

Midway, it bounced a few times down several meters and rolled around.

Bouncing down and hitting the corner of the stairs, the sushi roll didn’t scream things like “Gya!” or “Nuo!” Instead...

“Fugu.”

Thus, with that shallow voice, the roll loosened; and as if to lay a carpet down the stairs, the white cloth acting as the seaweed spread out.

Following the movement with their eyes, the expanding cloth reached to their feet with a rolling movement.

“__ __”

The seaweed ran out right in front of those three.

At the same time, in a swastika-like pose, a naked Aoi gushed out in front of them.

However, realizing their presence, he looked up to them with a huge grin on his face and immediately raised up his right thumb.

“...Ah!? Hey, you guys, what are you here for!? Oh well, I’m a bit unrolled out here and I’d like to become a sushi roll again, so can you guys help roll me up!?”

The person himself, still lying down near the seaweed, turned to face his back to them and straightened himself up and shivered with nervousness.

“As kindly as a mother...!!”

Masazumi, along with the two on her sides, dug their toes into him without saying a word.

Chapter 27: The Powerful Below Ground

CHAPTER 27

"The Powerful Below Ground"



Does the powerless body
Think about the strength outside it.
Point Allocation (Sleeping Together)

Does the powerless body

Think about the strength outside it

Point Allocation (Sleeping Together)

Azuma came to his senses.

...Nn.

He recovered his consciousness after a moment of blankness.

...Umm.

Questioning his situation, his sense of sight finally caught up with him.

It's dark, he thought; it was probably because his eyes were closed.

Before this he seemed to be in slumber, as if in hesitation. Realizing that, he came to feel the rest of his body. His body at present was in a lying position, turned to the right and lying on his face. A blanket, warm with body temperature, was laid over him; and he seemed to be tucked snug in a soft futon.

...Huh?

Something's wrong. The bad feeling straightened his mind. The reason for that bad feeling was...

...This isn't the usual futon...

It was soft, but dusty as well. His was soft and had a fragrant smell, but...

...That was in the quarters of the Testament Union...

Thinking up to that point, his thoughts linked with his memories and the rest of his mind.

Right now, he was back on Musashi, rooming with the girl called Miriam Poqou.

“__”

Azuma opened his eyes. In front of him was the figure of a girl, sleeping face up. However, this girl who slept under the blanket on the futon with him was

not Miriam. She was a small child. She was not even the age to attend primary school.

Her body was transparent. The futon she was sleeping in, the wall on the other side of the room; everything could be seen through her.

The girl turned her body slightly and wrinkled her eyebrows.

“Nn...”

She moved her arm, which was lightly holding down the blanket.

Azuma looked at the crumple between her eyebrows.

...Err.

He was at a loss, but he held her right hand. That moment, the cold hand of the girl, translucent and with no color other than white, sank into his as if to melt. Still...

“It’s alright.”

She was able to grip his hand. He was uncertain, but it could be seen. Her hand felt thin; holding a net made out of paper would feel this way, he thought, but nevertheless she was able to hold it.

“It’s going to be alright.”

Stating that to the girl, he returned the grasp as if to not let go of her fingers. Doing so, the girl took no more than one breath.

“...”

She loosened the tension between her eyebrows and returned to deep breathing.

In response to her relief, Azuma let out a breath.

At that moment, a voice came from the other side of the girl.

“So how does it feel like, suddenly becoming a father, Azuma?”

Eh? He raised his face and saw a wheelchair approach. Seated on it was a girl, her wavy hair overlapped over her stole. Looking at her, Azuma said...

“Miriam...”

“That is correct. Still, if you’re awake...what are you going to do? At this time.”

In response to the words she said with a long sigh and a hand on her chin, Azuma looked around him.

He was on the lower bed of a double bunk. The futon had a flower pattern, and there were girl things like clothes hung above by a string connecting to the tabletop.

“Ah, s-sorry, this was your mattress, wasn’t it!?”

“Bed, huh...”

To her words spoken with half-closed eyes, Azuma realized his mistake in choosing his words. However, he didn’t know how else to say it. He considered getting up, but the inside of his hand was still weakly held by the hand he grasped back.

“Yesterday, you couldn’t get that sleeping girl up to your bed so I lent you mine, you know? She won’t let go of you, after all. Do you remember? I was asking you about a lot of things, but you went right to sleep back then. With a speed as if you’d used a sleep spell as well.”

“No, that is...”

Trying to say something to change the topic, Azuma felt the need to apologize; anyhow, he thought about getting up to lower his head.

Then, as if to comb his hair, his raised head brushed against the clothes hung down from the countertop. Taking a short glance at them, Azuma panicked and looked away.

“I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to look at your underwear or anything!”

“I didn’t need to hear that, you know!”

He was scolded with a reddened face.

Miriam looked at the flustered Azuma from inside the bed bunker.

Right now, the hand she had on her cheek had a sensation of warmth. However, rather than that...

“Azuma, there are lots of complicated things occurring right now, and I want some explanations.”

“W-what? D-did I do something wrong? Did I!?”

...I wonder why he is so scared...

Miriam was aware of the harshness in her personality, but she did not expect someone to be afraid of her even when she wasn't mad. Her first impression may have not been the greatest; but in her defense, she was being careful at that time. Because there was no better choice than that for her, she ended up saying “Well, whatever.”

Miriam continued her conversation.

“Last night, when you suddenly brought that kid in here, I was thinking about how there exists a naive kindness that surpasses human knowledge; but, Azuma, you...”

Miriam pointed to the closed door.

“The Far East's Guard Unit is watching us from over there, in pairs, you know.”

“Eh...? The Guard Unit...?”

Miriam swore to herself not to get angry, showing a smile.

“I heard about it. They're guarding a VIP, aren't they?”

“Oh, a VIP, huh...”

“Yes, a VIP, you know? ...But who could it be, I wonder? Is it me? Or is it that child?”

“...Eh? No, see, you know...”

At Azuma's incoherent speech, Miriam clapped both hands to her cheeks because her smile was on the verge of breaking down. She reinstated her will to keep that smile on.

“You never uttered a single word about you being the crown prince yesterday, did you?”

“No, you see. That was before, you know!? I'm secularizing myself, now I'm

just a normal person, see!?”

“Other people won’t see you as such, you know.”

Miriam broke down her smile with a long sigh. Placing her hand on her forehead, she rubbed between her eyebrows with her fingers to remove any formed wrinkles.

“Well, it’s not like I don’t understand your feelings. Taking care not to make it awkward between us or such; you’ve probably been burdening yourself with unnecessary problems after all. Still...”

Miriam once again pointed in the sliding door’s direction.

“I was pretty surprised when they suddenly came to stand guard and opened the door with the manager’s master key this morning, you know? You were completely out cold that time as well.”

“Eh? W-what happened? What is going on outside?”

Yes, Miriam made a smile once again and said.

“The people outside understood, you know? ...That Your Highness the Crown Prince has brought a little ghost girl into his cohabitation together with a girl, I mean.”

While she was talking, Azuma’s face adopted a shade of blue.

Um, he prefaced, *err*, hanging his head.

“Should we, um, correct them?”

“Oh ho, why is that?”

To that question, Azuma’s head dropped so low it could reach the bed.

“It’s causing you trouble...”

...Oh my.

Miriam lightened just a bit in her heart.

...So it’s not to clear their misunderstanding of him, is it?

I see, she then thought in her heart.

“I don’t mind, really.”

He would be the one affected the most by this misunderstanding, but he himself considered her more.

“You don’t understand, do you?”

Azuma raised his head to those words. By the crumple in his eyebrows, he didn’t seem to understand her words. She, the one who did, decided not to spoil herself. What she should say now is...

“I don’t mind you hiding stuff from me. Even for me...I’m a girl, so I have a lot of secrets as well.”

“No, but, I’m concerned about the conditions outside...”

“Outside? They’re making a lot of noise. The Chancellor guys have had their rights taken away, and Princess Horizon is sentenced to suicide, and furthermore Musashi will be transferred over to the Testament Union. But the craziest of them all is...the people from our class are standing up to the Provisional Council’s side, and facing off with the vice president associated with them.”

The look on Azuma’s face said “Huh?” Thinking that he’s the kind of person to show that expression a lot, Miriam pointed to the ceiling. Indicating the Academy on the surface up there she continued.

“For now, they seem to be holding a special student general meeting.”

Miriam relayed what the members of the guard unit outside told her.

“The official topic is ‘No Confidence in the Vice President’, but it’s also ‘Deciding the Course of Action regarding the Future of Musashi and the Far East’; attended by the two parties of the parliament-aligned vice president and the Academy’s side. The decision will become representative of the whole Academy.”

Then Azuma said, alternating his gaze between himself and the hand of the girl he was holding: “We have to go as well...”

...What a difficult person.

At a loss for what to say, Miriam closed her eyes once and decided.

She will speak. Looking straight at him, with what wisdom she can.

“You see here. Your very actions may hold influence over the whole of the Far East, not to mention Musashi itself. Whatever the case, looking at the trend of this case, the Testament Union will move to take control of the Far East; at least that is what they are saying.”

“What a reckless thing...”

“Why do you think the guard unit is guarding outside our door? They want to protect you, prevent you from going out and showing the influence of you just being there to the outside, you know? The capital where the Emperor’s territory is belongs to the Far East; but it is a sacred territory separated from all political concerns, working only to keep the Ley Lines stable. That’s why, even if the Far East becomes completely ruled, the capital will still remain untouched. And your presence is of the son of the Emperor supporting this world, with a sound connection to the capital.”

Then.

“The people of the Far East will see meaning in your actions, even if you don’t want them to. You cannot ignore the influence your actions will have on the Testament Union as well as the other countries.”

“If that’s the case...”

“I think that the people on Musashi are lost right now, each forming their own resolve. If you were to move then, what do you think will happen?”

To that question, Azuma lowered his gaze. Looking at the space of his free hand...

“...There will be people coming out to support me?”

It wouldn’t be at as strong a level as for them to “come out”, but there was no point in correcting that mistake. Miriam thought about making her way of speech softer.

“What I think should happen is for everyone to come up with their conclusion as the students of the Far East. We should believe in their decision and hold solidarity towards whatever that will happen to us. If you were to join the fray, the decision will not be made by the students of the Far East, but because ‘the crown prince said so’.”

Thus...

“At the very least, until the end of this special student general meeting, I don’t think you should act. Until then, it’d be best for you to think things through by yourself whether justice lies either on the Union’s side or on the Academy’s. The Broadcasting Committee just so happens to be recording this live, so how about you open a sign frame and watch?”

To those words, Azuma sighed and buried his face in the futon.

“I don’t like troublesome things...”

“It won’t be troublesome. Thinking by yourself, no more than what you can, is natural, isn’t it? If you abandon that, the ‘former crown prince’ of the world will behave strangely and won’t turn out well.”

“But,” Miriam said resting her arms on the armrest and showing a smile to the boy.

“Your Highness the Crown Prince of this room loves to complain, does he not?”

“Are you bullying me?”

“I’m just saying that you’re a person that will come through when needed no matter what anyone says, is all.”

Miriam deepened her smile towards the person whose body had sunk deep into the bed.

...You’re really a considerate person, aren’t you.

Azuma’s secularization was probably due to the request of the Testament Union; but because of that, Miriam thought in this way: He did not obey them just because they said so. If he were a person to just follow people’s orders, he would not have suggested joining in the dangerous movement the people at the Academy have agreed to.

Azuma still hasn’t realized his own importance; but if stuff like the Union’s request were to be brought up, he could understand the meaning of his presence and move.

And yet, if he were to think of something, he would act without regard for

himself.

“What a difficult person.”

“You’re the more difficult one in my opinion, Miriam.”

“Oh my, there is no girl easy to deal with, you know?”

“How difficult are you, Miriam?”

Did he ask that without realizing what it meant? she wondered in her heart. Only a bitter smile rose to her lips.

“You’ll only shiver knowing how difficult girls are, you know. The men in the world possessing a woman may have thought that they have captured their partner. ...But no woman would ever think of lowering her difficulty looking at the effort a man puts in.”

“I can’t win against you...”

Whispering, Azuma let out a breath and at that moment the girl on the bed suddenly twisted her body.

With a bundle between her eyebrows, Azuma held back her hand. Still, the girl said...

“Mama...”

Her left hand reached out to thin air.

“Where...?”

To that question, Miriam made eye contact with Azuma. With lowered eyebrows, he said: “U-umm, Miriam...?”

“You’re raring to depend on other people saying ‘this child is mine from today onwards!’ aren’t you? ...How about you sharpen your mind a bit, enough to consider holding both her hands?”

“But I’ll look like a criminal targeting little girls if I pin her down like that!”

“You won’t get off so easily if the guards outside see you like that...”

“You don’t intend to cover for me when that time comes, do you?”

“Mama...”

Responding to the voice intervening in their conversation, Azuma looked straight at Miriam. The words she heard were...

“Miriam.”

“...Saying my name leaving out what you want me to do is unfair, you know?”

Still, Miriam reclined her wheelchair and made herself horizontal. As the leg section raised to become horizontal as well for balance, the wheelchair became a bed.

Moving her armrest in the bed’s direction as if to lead it there, she used her arms to lean out her body.

“Nn...”

Turning over to look at the side, she gathered her disabled legs together with the hem of the skirt, held them up and pulled them.

It was an act she was used to doing, but with her disheveled hair and clothes, she didn’t look too good.

Still, Azuma, who was looking at Miriam transferring herself over to this bed said: “Thank you.”

He was looking at her with an expression of relief.

It was the first time she had shown him the way she moved to her bed. Still, without any surprise, he...

...Didn’t even offer to help me.

He was expecting her to help the girl who wanted to be saved from her nightmare.

“Mama...”

“Yes.”

Oh my, I have to be myself, Miriam thought, holding the translucent hand of the girl that looked so fragile. Then, fixing her hair with her free hand and looking at him, she saw a smile with eyes arched like a bow.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mind me. This will happen a lot more from now on, after all.”

I’ve lost, Miriam whispered in her heart. *Did I lower my difficulty, I wonder?*

The sky was blue.

There were figures on both sides of the bridge hanging over the academy courtyard.

On one side, towards the campus, the figures were clad in school uniforms. From the windows of the academy, from the rooftop; even from the courtyard, the figures of students gathering could be seen.

In contrast, on the side towards the town, there were three figures.

In the middle, the one in a male uniform looked forward and took one step along with a gentle breeze.

“I will now offer my greetings once again.”

The person in uniform lightly raised her right hand, covered in a white glove, to touch her chest.

“I am the Vice President of the Musashi Ariadust Academy Student Council, Honda Masazumi. In regards to the special student general meeting you hold, I have come to offer a way for us, the whole student body, to settle this. Over here, the representative of the Engineering Club, Naomasa, and that of the knights, Nate Mitotsudaira, have also come to act as witnesses.”

Saying that, Masazumi looked around her.

...There are a lot of people.

Below the stairs. Outside the gates of the academy. Among the greenery and town spread out below them as well. Even on the decks of the ships to their left and right, people were there.

In front of her, one student came out from among the group of students on the bridge.

The tall, lean figure was...

“I am the Former Treasurer, Shirojiro Bertoni. I accept your proposal. The

whole student body have already agreed to have me represent them. We will duel to decide the course of action of the Musashi.”

Saying that, Shirojiro pulled close by the inner collar a young man with an incomplete uniform, taking irregular steps due to his being pulled from behind.

“Ah, Shiro! I haven’t tightened my sash yet! Taking my clothes off before I even get to finish putting them on is boring, you know!?”

“Shut up. Toori, I need you for the sake of money for now. Do your job, Mr. Impossible. If you hadn’t gone and had our rights taken away this would all have been settled without any problems; now I have to hold this kind of thing by the stairs. ...What a waste of money.”

...They never change.

Ignoring Toori’s wriggling body, Masazumi posed a question to Shirojiro.

“The topic for the special student general meeting was the vote of no confidence in me and the Academy’s decision for its course of action, was it not?”

“That’s right. Your side will be the Testament Union’s, and mine will be that of Musashi.”

“...The decisions of the Chancellor and Student Council President are absolute; internal conflicts are handled by them as the heads of students, with the general public not being able to participate. That is the structure of power in this world as it is right now.

“However, the Academy functions only to bring the people together; they will be the ones to receive the aftereffects of its actions. Do you understand the influence the decision we reach in this meeting will have on the people? Do you really think that we can stand a chance against the Testament Union?”

Shirojiro faced her in response to her question. Looking at the people behind her...

“More than twenty years ago, Headmaster Sakai protected Musashi from the advances of the Catholic religion by K.P.A. Italia. ...That time, the Mikawa Chancellor’s Office Headmaster Sakai, with himself serving as its chancellor,

started a fight using the rights of Musashi's Chancellery which were under their care, didn't they?"

"Right. Using the period of time when P.A. Oda's arms trading fleet was coming to trade with Mikawa, the Union's activity was restrained. Utilizing the fact that attacking the foreign Far East settlements in other countries would mean not being able to trade with Musashi to block their advance, Headmaster Sakai and several other people went to numerous battles in the coastal region of Seto Bay. ...As a result, Mikawa was able to cut K.P.A. Italia and the Catholics' advancements short."

This event would have been detailed in political and related books; not only was it the incident where the existence of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings appeared in this world, but it was also the major cause for the rise in Mikawa's influence.

"However, the school rules have been amended so as to not allow such a thing to happen freely. The times have changed. It's best for you to cease the thought of opposing the Testament Union and thinking you can win."

"Then, whether our course of action right now opposes the Union or not; the special student general meeting is to determine that."

"I see."

Masazumi made a bitter smile.

She looked around the background. At the end of her gaze, on both of Musashi's ships to each side and on the one in front, assembled in the roads or at the edge of the ships' decks, figures of people observing them could be seen. Even at the lower end of the Academy's staircase and right in the middle of in front of her, people were gathered.

Masazumi looked at them, and said...

"Well then, shall we start our duel? We'll have three representatives from both the Union's and the Academy's sides, and the first to two wins will be the victor.

"The result of this duel will decide the consensus opinion of the Academy. If the Union's side wins, we will recognize Horizon's suicide and Musashi will be

transferred. If Musashi's side wins..."

"We will head out to save Horizon. That is all. The methods of dueling will not be limited to anything. Battles, negotiations, or any other competing methods; anything can be used. Through these methods, the Union's side will indicate that opposition is futile and ours will show that we can stand up to them."

Judge, Masazumi affirmed Shirojiro's words.

"Then, the first participant..."

Who will it be? The moment when these words were about to be said, Naomasa at her side fixed the position of the pipe in her mouth.

"I'll have the pleasure of going first."

"Eh? Naomasa, what are you planning to..."

Mitotsudaira, herself already taking a step forward, asked Naomasa.

That moment, Naomasa breathed out some smoke with a smile on her face and looked back at her.

"We, the Engineering Club, are aware that if we were to abide by the Provisional Council's side we would lose our workplace that is the Musashi. ...If we have to choose, we are taking the Academy's side."

However, Naomasa made eye contact with Mitotsudaira, holding her left hand out to her.

Her tightened fist lightly beat against Mitotsudaira's chest.

"The club's uncertainty is a simple thing: standing up to the Union or whatever, our concern is what will happen if the Musashi is sunk. We'd like to avoid that. Then...no, therefore, I'd like to hear it: If worst comes to worst and we're going to go on an all-out war against the Union, how the Musashi, with no clear weaponry, will fight.

"...Going to war with insufficient means to fight is asking for the impossible after all."

She then looked in both the town's and everyone's direction while drawing her breath.

“Among the military might of a country, what do you think will represent it the best on a battlefield? Airships? Aircraft? Mechanical Armor? Or is it knights? No, what the Engineering Club wants to say is this: They are not.”

Naomasa raised her clenched fist upwards puffing out smoke from her mouth.

“Old man Taizou! Send it over!!”

As if to respond to those words, a voice resounded from below the stairs in front of the Academy.

“Leave it to me!!”

The one who let out that loud, husky voice was an old man in working clothes. Around his white-haired, lean figure, there was a group of people in similar clothes. All of them raised their left hand, just like Naomasa did.

That moment, in front of Naomasa and each of those people, a torii-shaped, teal-colored sign frame appeared. The characters written in bold lettering on it were...

“Launch Possible.”

“Link...!”

Naomasa and those people slammed their left fists onto the sign frames.

The sign frames, beaten in midair, distorted and broke into pieces.

The sound of glass breaking echoed with a definite creak below the blue sky.

Right after that...

From below the back section of the middle front ship, by Musashino’s Engineering division, something soared into the sky.

Flying through the sky leaving white trails of mist, even those who caught sight of it could not describe it. What they could see was just, for a moment, a dark shape.

While someone whispered “What’s that?” Naomasa let out a large amount of smoke and spoke.

“My Mouse is a bit special. ...Well, you’d understand if you think about it; but

you're wondering the same thing, aren't you? Why a young girl like me is associating herself with those at the Engineering Club and stuff, and... How I will use this absurdly big mechanical arm I have on this enormous ship. To answer that, how about all of us go on a little field trip?"

Saying that, it arrived from the sky.

It crashed to the ground.

Falling down from the sky like a wall to block the wind, something dropped behind Naomasa with a thunderous roar.

Shaking the impact shock absorbing torii-type crest (which had expanded above the bridge) with a loud sound, then landing and standing with an imposing stance was a feminine-type iron giant, clad in red and black.

A heavy-type God of War.



境界線のライン
—The Line of the World—

Naomasa

It was a red shape resembling a woman, no less than ten meters in height. It didn't possess any wings.

"...The Heavy-type God of War 'Jizuri Suzaku'. When I was on land, I gathered the pieces of a God of War I found on the ground around my homeland that became a battleground. I was planning to use it for farm work, but a lot of things happened and now my Mouse is in there using it for work. With a battle-type line of origin, no one in the Engineering Club's heavy God of War operation group could win against it."

"Yet again...you love to show off in strange ways, don't you, Naomasa?"

"Getting it through narrow roads to bring it to the surface of the Musashi would only be a bother, so I've had it modified with anchor launch equipment and blasted out to here. It'll be taken back hanging from a ship; and in order to increase the accuracy of its landing position, the launching equipment can only fire it to a limit of about two kilometers."

Saying that, Naomasa raised her mechanical right arm.

As if to respond, light shone from the God of War's eyes; and Naomasa let out a small laugh.

"It's a cute one, isn't she? A proper 10-ton class, remotely operated by this right arm of mine. Because of the priority of torque considerations in interchanging parts for work, the armor has been removed; but it's quite wise to think of its power as on par with that of other countries' heavy Gods of War. So who can stand up to this one among you guys? Show me your methods and your results; whether or not the disarmed Far East still has a way to fight."

Now...

"The only people who can go head-to-head against a God of War are the hero-class of a country...like Tachibana Muneshige or the Pope Chancellor on the other side, the Eight Dragon Kings, or Galileo's class type. On our side, it'll be Mito, huh. Still, if we're going to oppose the Testament Union, we'll be in trouble if those kinds of people are not normally around.

“How about it? Is there anyone who can fight it?”

At Naomasa’s voice, everyone was silent. Even the people in the town had their heads turned to look at the standing huge frame of red.

It’s impossible, a few small voices started to rise.

However, there was a voice in response to Naomasa’s question. It was in front of her. The one who raised his voice was not Shirojiro standing there, but Toori, who was sitting on the floor. What he said was...

“...Then, you go, Shiro.”

At those words, everyone raised their doubts.

Among the people who were gathered at the entrance to the Academy, Tenzou came out in a panic.

“T-Toori-dono! Why are you having a complete businessman like Bertoni-dono go up against the likes of Naomasa-dono as if you don’t mind getting someone killed!? Just what are you planning to do!?”

“Ah. ...You know why, don’t you, Tenzou? It’s revenge.”

“T-the worst! This guy is the worst!!”

“It’s ’cause this brute of a businessman is always saying cruel things to me every time, you know? Get yourself tattered. Mess yourself up and reflect on your actions, alright?”

“Oh ho. In other words, if I win, my actions will be justified, is that it?”

Shirojiro patted Toori’s shoulders once and stepped forward.

“How cheap. I’ll make you regret this for your whole life.”

“Eh, you seem to be quite into this, aren’t you?”

“Even with a big risk, it carries a big collateral, after all. ...With the trust of the Engineering Club and proof of us being able to take on Gods of War on sale, this duel is a steal. I have the further privilege of making a fool out of an idiot as well.”

In the middle of everyone’s gazes, Shirojiro opened a hardpoint by his neck and called his white fox out.

Then he faced in Naomasa's direction with an expression of flat eyebrows.

"Naomasa, in regards to my spell's contract, I require Heidi to support me as an intermediary. You have no problems with that, right?"

"Judge, it's how you always are after all. Still, Shirojiro, you're a treasurer and a businessman, aren't you? I'd like to see how you're going to fight against a God of War as well."

With those words, Naomasa moved; jumping as if to ride on the left hand which Jizuri Suzaku behind her held out.

"Everyone, move for a bit!"

Moving Jizuri Suzaku to stand off against Shirojiro...

"...Let's do this with a bang!!"

With those words, Jizuri Suzaku suddenly broke out and rushed into a smash blow towards the businessman.

The sound of a crash resounded far and wide.

Chapter 28: The Usurper in Town

CHAPTER 28

"The Usurper in Town"



Possessed
By the love of money
How far can one go
Point Allocation (Miser)

Possessed

By the love of money

How far can one go

Point Allocation (Miser)

Under the afternoon sky, above the bridge in front of the Academy where a light wind blows.

The steam and heat mirage Jizuri Suzaku exuded indicated a single blow by its arm.

But anyone in that area could hear a certain sound.

The metallic sound of the strike being blocked. The sound of a wanton fist hitting.

At the end of the strike that landed, where the wind made by the fist died down, there was a single person.

It was Shirojiro. His figure had received the blow, still...

“...He’s unharmed?”

Just as Naomasa said from Jizuri Suzaku’s shoulder while frowning her eyebrows, he was indeed unharmed.

At the end of her suspecting glance, Shirojiro, with no apparent wounds, lightly raised both his arms above his head. At the end of those arms, held out in a cross, Suzaku’s fist was there, in contact.

One could almost see that he had stopped its fist in its tracks.

At that moment the posture of the God of War was clearly leaning forward, its hips turned. Still, as if it had hit an invisible wall, the fist stopped halfway and its arm did not extend fully.

The attack was stopped.

While someone was whispering “Impossible,” a new sound could be heard:

The sound of the God of War regaining its footing and withdrawing the fist

that had hit empty space.

Then, stepping back from its human opponent, the God of War took on a posture.

Shirojiro, on the other side, raised his gaze while retaining the position of his arms that had blocked the God of War's fist.

He looked at Naomasa standing on top of the Heavy God of War's shoulder.

Towards Naomasa, whose eyebrows were still frowning in doubt, Shirojiro slowly opened his mouth.

A sound could be heard. It was a voice, resounding quietly with a low tone.

"Now then, not minding however high a customer is looking down at him from is what a businessman does."

"...So what is Mr. Businessman here going to sell me?"

Shirojiro did not answer.

Instead, Naomasa continued looking at both the God of War's stopped fist and Shirojiro's face.

"What kind of spell was that?"

"Hmm, you could say that it is a spell. It's really something more simple..."

Shirojiro, placing the white fox on his head, said in a straightforward manner:

"The power of money."

"See here; if we are to see war as an economic activity, the act of going into battle will most likely boil down to money."

With Shirojiro's words, the white fox on his head raised its forelimbs. In response, countless sign frames appeared. Making sure of the amounts that were displayed, Shirojiro said:

"Sanct, the god I am contracted with, is a commerce god associated with Inari; but gods of commerce hold a certain power towards other gods. That is, the power to use money in the exchanges between gods."

“Just what are you trying to say?”

“Do you not understand?”

Shirojiro gestured to the back with his chin.

Behind him, over at the Academy’s entrance, seated on the ground was a group of people.

Those people, with torii-type sign frames in front of their faces, were...

“The vice commander of the Guard Unit, as well as 150 other people. I am ‘renting’ the power of the Guard Unit.”

The vice commander spoke, and the other members nodded; all of them closed their eyes.

They were not moving. As if ceasing to breathe, they were on their knees, not showing even the slightest movement.

However, Heidi, looking at them from in front of the entrance, let out a voice in their stead. Lightly raising her eyebrows, she opened her mouth.

“We have borrowed the ‘manpower’ of the Guard Unit as a single bundle on an hourly rate basis. The members themselves have obtained the protection of their labor god, so the rest is easy. Transferring money over to Sanct’s shrine, we are able to buy the manpower of the Guard Unit from the labor god’s shrine using ours as an intermediary. Making intermediary transactions for the protection of gods outside the contract would probably go the same way.”

In front of Shirojiro the sign frames displayed currency amounts.

“Under the shrine’s assessment, we will have to pay five times the usual hourly wage of the Guard Unit to obtain their manpower. The wage itself will be 5,000 yen per hour, but because of the intermediary fee we’ll have to pay double: 10,000 yen. Borrowing the power of 150 people will cost 1,500,000 yen per hour. ...Shiro-kun, use it well, alright? Because of the sudden transaction, this will come out of your pocket money after all.”

“Can we afford all that?”

“Hmm, I’ll just have the Guard Unit cut out our receipt and process it through the miscellaneous expenses of the Student Council’s budget, just to be safe.”

“Judge. Please also request for half of the payment to be from the Chancellor’s Officers budget.”

Shirojiro looked at the arms he raised and then turned to face Naomasa.

“Right now, I am able to concentrate the strength of 150 people of the Guard Unit into one point. In terms of weight, with 70 kilograms per person, about 15 tonnes, huh. It’ll be enough against your 10-tonne class Heavy God of War.”

With those words, several long, armor-type torii-shaped crests appeared on both his arms and legs.

Then, looking up to Naomasa’s face, Shirojiro said:

“Can you see how equal we are?”

“I guess.”

Naomasa pulled both of Jizuri Suzaku’s arms back, and thrust them behind its hips.

Two long wrenches dropped into its hands. The red Heavy God of War spun them around once, then brandished them.

“So we’ll have no choice but to fight!!”

With Naomasa’s words, Jizuri Suzaku went for another strike.

The noise of heavy objects moving resounded in a room with many windows.

It was a long and wide room, like a classroom, but its size was that of two.

Located on the first floor of the building, on the side facing the left side of the ship carrying the Musashi Ariadust Academy, it was the staff room with the desks of the teachers lined up.

At that moment, reacting to the sounds of the wind, echoes of the land and the movements of machines resounding from the outside...

“...!”

Wah, a voice could be heard to exclaim, along with the sounds of several footsteps.

The noise was enough to shake the building of the Academy; but the staff, positioned at their desks, seemed to pay no heed to what was going on outside. Many of them, with cups of tea to their mouths, were marking their tests.

However, on the seat near the right entrance to the room, one teacher's body trembled at the sounds.

The glasses-wearing teacher, with her seat rotated to the side, faced the figure in a jersey next to her.

"Makiko-senpai... Shouldn't we do something about that?"

"You think too much, Mitsuki. Besides, we're not allowed to interfere with the students' disputes per the academy rules, are we? You didn't need to stand up to them back then as well. You're not finished with the snacks Nakai-sensei gave, you know."

Sanyou nodded while her shoulders moved with yet another shriek from the outside.

...They're moving away, huh.

"Are they fighting in another place...?"

"Worried? About them fighting somewhere you can't see, I mean."

After a few thoughts, Sanyou turned her head down thinking she was really worried.

"Judge. ...Makiko-senpai, are you not? Is your trust in them to that extent?"

"Hmm, I wonder how I should say this..."

Rather than a look of trouble, Oriotorai displayed an expression as if to examine the situation.

"Whatever the case, if we're to go to all-out war with the Testament Union, things won't just end like this, you know?"

At how easily the words "all-out war" were uttered, Sanyou felt a twinge of fear and suddenly raised her hips.

"M-Makiko-senpai, are you wishing for war!?"

"Oh my, do you think war will happen if I wish for it?"

Calmly and in the center of Sanyou's field of vision, Oriotorai sat in her seat turned sideways. Leaning against her backrest, bringing her legs together, she focused her ears to listen for the whereabouts of the metallic sounds.

"Only a student can face off with another student. However, anyone knows that such a thing is just an idealistic thought. Battles will break and ruin the towns and farmland, and others will definitely be involved in them. Even if they take place in the forests and the seas, resources and the environment will take damage; and the economic pressure will throw people's lives out of order. Especially for the Musashi, with both an Academy and a city; a student conflict could easily plunge this place into being a 'helpless battlefield'. ...Well, there's always the option of turning the citizens into shields, though."

"Makiko-senpai, is that what you teach them?"

"I did. How to use the citizens as cover, at least."

Oriotorai said it nonchalantly. Despite losing her words at that declaration, Sanyou...

"Wha-..."

What a thing to do, she wanted to say; but she held back, tears welling up in her eyes.

"...Gh!"

She looked down. At that moment, Oriotorai grabbed the cup on her table and said.

"If the enemy chooses to use such a tactic, they'll need to know how to deal with it, you know? If we're trying to avoid getting the world involved all the time, the enemy's cheap tactics will never give us the ideal situation. That's why, in order to be able to deal with however low a method the enemy uses and take back control, we must start with knowing how to do it and obtaining the power to do so. With that thought, this is how I began... We will not use these unfair tactics, nor will they make us do so."

I'm sorry, and then Oriotorai showed a smile with lowered eyebrows to Sanyou.

“Mitsukin’s way of teaching and mine differ quite a lot, after all. I’m sorry for saying such shocking things.”

“Ah, no...”

...So it’s not like such unfair methods or any cruel things were taught positively, is it...?

How embarrassing it is for me who doubted that, even for a little. Still...

...Senpai, you were dancing so much when you were drunk back then, breaking Shinagawa’s transport elevator with your stomping...

Sanyou hung her head in her heart, but did her best not to let that show on her face.

The sounds they heard became distant echoes. Stealing a glance in the window’s direction, Sanyou spoke.

“Makiko-senpai, do you think we will go to all-out war with the Testament Union?”

“Judge. The Union, in my opinion, will eventually mobilize its forces to conquer the whole of the Far East after all.”

Oriotorai held the cup to her mouth, then let it part. Then, drawing a breath...

“As I see it, everything is possible. Whether their opponent is the Testament Union or whatever else, I taught those kids to return any unreasonable blows they receive. If I had to choose, I think I have taught them to act such that they will not be hit, as well as to find a way even when people are bashing them up.”

Sanyou was silent. Beside her, the woman in General Affairs had her head down even when she was placing her cup of tea on the desk; but her gaze was fixed in Oriotorai’s direction.

In response, Oriotorai put her cup back down onto the desk, faced Sanyou’s way and opened her mouth.

“My way of teaching is so that when circumstances demand the irrational, my students will still be able to stand up and look forward. Your way of teaching, Mitsuki, is so that when circumstances demand the unreasonable, your students will still be able to move in another direction. Still, you know? I think

this way as well.”

Scratching her head, she laughed as if helpless. The words she gave away next were...

“To be frank, we shouldn’t have one without the other, right?”

“Eh...?”

“Don’t ‘eh’ me, think about it. To face chaos, one must first assert his rights, no? Receiving such a thing with a sidestep like ‘lower your head and stop fighting’ will not work. Even if your aim is to avoid conflict, their irrationality has still taken things away from you. The other party, thinking that their unreasonable methods will snatch them victory, will then continue to use them against you.”

Still.

“On the other hand, hitting and breaking things without thinking of the consequences is bad as well. It’ll all be over when things break after all.”

Therefore.

“The power to stand up and face them when the time comes, and the ability to find a new direction when you understand your inability to fight them... The person that does not possess these two things, unable to evade nor oppose irrationality, will merely become someone who can only placate himself with lies or someone whose only response to failure is death.”

“I wonder myself,” Oriotorai continued.

“Right now, with people talking about the Apocalypse, the world is losing its direction. For this world, there is a place where they think it’s alright to press irrationality down onto; the Far East. This is where the Logismoi Óplo come in, then. The weapons that may prevent the Apocalypse and present a new direction to the world. Therefore, to that extent, the world must have thought that it’s fine to unreasonably tire the Far East out... I wonder.”

“The princess of Ariadust’s suicide, is it? Unreasonable...”

“The foreign settlements, the provisional rule over various places, the decision of where Musashi will sail to, the election of people with weak

influence for the positions of president and chancellor... Everything.”

Saying that, Oriotorai raised her voice and then turned it into a smile.

“Leave Japanese cuisine out of that. Irrationality has no effect on that after all, right? Japanese cuisine is good, right?”

“Makiko-senpai, all you eat is meat. With stuff like beer, at that.”

“With a teacup, rice and miso soup it’s Japanese, you know? That area. Safe line.”

She let her legs which she had been holding close together go, but her gaze did not leave Sanyou’s.

“Back then, at the library, you said some things to Shirojiro and the guys, didn’t you?”

“T-that is, well...”

Her face reddening, Sanyou cast her eyes down.

“Just what did I say, I thought...”

“Important things. I’ve been meaning to teach them those things as well, but things just come with the job. Having teachers with the same line of thought would have chipped away at their hearts. Also, Mitsuki, this is how I see it. There’s the politics involved in banning former students and staff who hold power higher than students from participating in disputes, but...”

As if to choose her words, with a slow tone, Oriotorai continued.

“The first and foremost duty of teachers is to act to allow their students to live on. Then, isn’t it that our not participating in student disputes is to make sure that such conflicts do not end in death and to preserve the world, I wonder.”

...To preserve?

To Sanyou tilting her head in confusion, Oriotorai showed an affirmation.

“Judge. In this warring period, are we not the balancers that allow power and refuge to coexist, I wonder. With people like me, and people like you, either of us with a method to survive; teaching those things to allow everyone to make

their own decisions. ...Still, so that nothing is lost.”

That would have been nice, Oriotorai smiled bitterly.

Right then, a metallic sound shook the windows.

“A~ah.”

Beyond the window, looking at the students going down the stairs to follow the chaos, Oriotorai let out a murmur.

“I want to go there as well. They’re showing off a lot of things, you know?”

The sound of iron echoed in the streets.

It was coming from the left side of Okutama, by the town separated from a natural reserve.

Right now the noise traveled along the center of the roads, making its way to the bow of the ship at high speed.

The people did not waste any time in evacuating themselves from the streets. Over on the roofs of the nearby houses or under its outside corridors, all of their eyes were glued to the spectacle in front of them.

It was a clash of two powers.

On one side, a red feminine-type Heavy God of War. On the other, a lean figure whose uniform was clad in ether.

The red God of War swung both of its gigantic wrenches around, exhausting steam and heat; but the figure rode on its ether, blocked them and went for an attack.

The figure, Shirojiro’s movements, were that of a human. However, the ether that received its opponent’s blows and returned its own extended his actions to the limit, making them almost as huge as the God of War.

His fists, adorned in torii-type crests, continued to exchange blows with the God of War; and his legs accelerated further.

Clinging onto his shoulders, the white fox displayed dozens of torii-type sign frames from its tail; only for them to break and disappear.

From one of them, a voice rose.

“Shiro-kun! Don’t worry about the city! I’ve talked with the Engineering Club, and they’ve agreed to block any of Masa’s Jizuri Suzaku ‘labor’ towards the buildings!”

“I appreciate that. So it’s fine for me to go wild without worrying about breaking anything, huh.”

Said the girl with the mechanical arm, riding on the shoulder of the clothes Jizuri Suzaku was wearing.

While moving her, Naomasa’s fingers on her right mechanical arm linked to Suzaku as if to bring them together.

“Shirojiro!”

She shouted without pausing for the sounds of wind and metal from their attacks to die down, while still stepping forward.

“I want to hear your story. Why did you choose to make the Testament Union your enemy!? Even if they were to rule the Far East, a businessman such as yourself can just start your business over and return to your daily life!”

As the metallic sounds became a barrage, the heat mirages wavered in the wind and disappeared. Among them, Shirojiro chose to forcibly close the distance between them, then stepped forward, blocking the God of War’s attacks.

With a few high-speed steps, guarding against the metallic noises with his own, Shirojiro opened his mouth.

“The reason the Union is my enemy is simple. How about we talk money for a bit!?”

Ignoring his hair becoming disheveled from the wind made by the attacks, Shirojiro sprung forward and spoke.

“Whether it is under the Tsirhc, Mlasi or Buddhist religious principles, financial businesses are forbidden from drawing their revenue from interest! ‘One must not benefit without labor’ after all!

“However, the Far East is not bound under such a commandment, nor is the act itself seen as heretical. So, under the designations of the Tsirhc and Mlasi countries, the Far East has allowed Far Eastern banks to be made in the foreign settlements located in those nations. ...But!”

Shirojiro gripped the right hand he used against Jizuri Suzaku’s attack. Pointing a finger with that hand in the land port’s direction...

“That is the case for Tres España and a lot of other countries, but... Each country is under the Far East’s provisional rule, and in order to allow historical recreation to progress, numerous expenses are covered by the Far East’s generated monetary circulation; becoming the debt we call ‘international loans’!

“Especially Tres España; after the Reconquista the nation had to unify itself by clinging to the Tsirhc religion, rejecting all other teachings, heresy and species to purify its doctrine. They could no longer continue the activity of monetary circulation left to themselves. ...The nation known as Tres España has already declared bankruptcy for the second time, but even now their debt is piling up from securing their income from the New Continent. Under historical recreation, the time for their third bankruptcy should be near.”

“Similarly,” Shirojiro said. Like he stated earlier...

“Even for Hexagone Française and the M.H.R.R, the preparations for the Thirty Years’ War as well as their own surge in economic activity has shot their prices up through the roof! That, along with having to establish their forces and fund their political movements, have left them heavily in debt as well!”

“Just why in the world does that matter to you!?”

Driving a wrench in for a counterattack, Naomasa screamed while raising her speed.

“Spare me the business intros! Just what will happen if other countries are owing the Far East money!?”

“If the Far East comes under complete rule of another government, all of that will become void...!”

A tinge of sharpness made its way into Naomasa’s expression.

Even from the people surrounding them, voices like a commotion spilled from them as if in hesitation.

Still, Naomasa did not let her movements slow. As if concerned by the accumulation in the atmosphere, snapping the fingers of her mechanical arm loudly, she made Jizuri Suzaku dive in for an attack.

“Answer me, businessman! What will happen if all of that debt becomes void!?”

Both the people in town and those on the ships other than Okutama were observing the battle between Shirojiro and Naomasa through the ship’s broadcast. Live footage was shown on the monitors where houses and places had them, and the radios and broadcasting equipment were following every sound they made at that moment.

All of it was being recorded by the Broadcasting Committee over at the Musashi Ariadust Academy.

With video equipment on their shoulders, they were clawing through the crowds and reporting from the rooftops, doing what they could to pick up the images and sounds.

The voice that could be heard, Shirojiro’s deep voice, took the form of these words.

“What will happen when the debt becomes void? The answer is simple...!”

They listened.

“The money left in the care of the Far East’s banks belongs to other countries’ investors and corporations, but the savings of consumers are also stored in the same places. Those things are what the Far East earned through honest work with other countries, as well as the tax offerings the foreign settlements’ people paid to their feudal lords. If the money stays where it is now, not where it should be, because of the voiding; what will the Far East have left!?”

People were looking at what was displayed on the monitors in their dining rooms.

In the middle of the image, ignoring the gigantic metal wrench grazing past the right side of his face, Shirojiro pressed forward.

“Other countries will recover their own money and take away that of the Far East, Japan. After that, they will return the banks to the Far East under their rule but only in form, so that they themselves can make practical use of them. The people may be absorbed into each of the nations after the takeover, but they will have no money of their own when that happens. Without any way to resist or do anything else, their future will depend on the country that they are in.”

People were listening to Shirojiro’s voice on the broadcast, in a state of enough confusion to stop their ascent to the surface through the stairs. The young businessman’s voice was accompanied by the sound of guarding, like metal piling up against metal.

“Do you understand!? People are already moving. In fear of the debts being voided through the Testament Union’s rule after last night’s destruction of Mikawa, Far Easterners have already gone to withdraw their money; but...”

“What will happen?”

“Regarding Mikawa’s destruction as ‘A Possible Act of Hostility towards The Testament Union’, the Union has already frozen the Far East’s monetary circulation to ‘Avoid any Possible Capital Investment towards Further Hostile Acts’! Right now, in all other countries and settlements, all the banks are sealed off such as to prevent money from going over to the Far East’s side.”

“However,” everyone heard Shirojiro’s words.

In the middle of the screen, he blocked an attack and swung his own fist.

“Right now, there is one place where money still moves in the Far East. That place is Musashi. As an independent territory under no direct rule of a country, Musashi preserves its own financial circulation. Then, centering around the foreign settlements, the trend is that Far Easterners are dedicating the money they have to their shrines, exchanging it for external Bless and leaving it in Musashi’s care. ...Do you know what that means? Musashi is becoming the biggest fuel store and bank there is!”

Shirojiro continued.

“However, if we lose Horizon Ariadust and Musashi is transferred, everything ends. If that does not happen, Musashi will become a place where money and power gathers, and Mikawa’s Matsudaira will rule the Far East...!”

In the middle of the screen, Shirojiro let his fist burst forward.

In response to the gushing ether, the metal giant moved its wrenches for a blow.

The moment both parties’ attacks landed, Shirojiro’s voice reached the skies.

“Musashi can fight! So long as Musashi proves it can continue to fly and gather money, that is!”

The metallic sound caused Jizuri Suzaku to shake.

A number of figures remained on top of the bridge in front of the Academy.

From their position, a crimson figure could be seen in the town on the frontal left side of the vessel: Jizuri Suzaku’s upper body.

Towering above the rows of houses, its activity could be seen; the movements it made and the attacks it launched with both its arms. A sound could be heard with Suzaku’s every move, while the streams of steam it exhausted traveled like geysers and dispersed into the air.

The first two to watch over Naomasa and Shirojiro over in that area from the top of the bridge were Masazumi and Mitotsudaira.

Slightly behind them, Heidi and Toori were also there.

Heidi was standing, interacting with a number of sign frames, while Toori was seated on the floor.

Then, without notice, Heidi began to speak to no one in particular.

“To be frank, Shiro-kun and Masa have lost their initial motive and are just raging around, aren’t they?”

“Masa likes to party so it’s fine; but what about that Shiro? Sitting in the corner of the room, smirking and counting money all day every day must have

made him into an idiot, I'm guessing."

"Hmm, Shiro-kun will return to his true colors where money is involved so I think it's fine."

At least deny it! Masazumi tried to strike her down with a sidelong glance with half-closed eyes, but Heidi did not notice it.

As if to substitute, bringing out a parasol from her sleeve, Mitotsudaira opened her mouth.

"Still, I did not expect that. I knew Naomasa could ride on a God of War; but it surprises me how well-versed she is in hand-to-hand combat, to that extent."

"Is that so?"

To Masazumi's question, Mitotsudaira answered with a "Judge."

However, it was Heidi that continued those words.

"But Masa came to Musashi before elementary school, you know? Considering that her homeland was a village along the southern border of Qing, it's quite a big deal. Their enemies were always coming to raid, and even their allies were pressuring for payment, so they tried to become independent. She did say that she gathered the God of War remains in that village, no?"

"So that's what that red thing is, huh."

"Yes. Well, a lot of things happened and it came into Masa's possession. The mech guys were attacking everything, whether ally or enemy, but ended up destroying the village as well."

"Auge-chan..."

Toori said.

"Leave it at that. Isn't it bad for you to say what Masa won't?"

"Ah, right. Judge. I should apologize to Masa later."

"It's not that bad, you know? You should try saying sorry to me once in a while, instead. How about it?"

"Hmm... I'm worried that it'll feel horrible, that it'll feel like something else and that it'll drive me insane."

“Hey, do I have that frail of an image to make you crazy that quickly?”

“...Is that even frail?”

Masazumi drove another punchline, but her half-closed eyes were on Heidi.

“Are you not worried? Shirojiro is fighting against Naomasa and her God of War on his own, you know.”

“It’s fine, because I’m backing him up. Worrying about him will only show my incompetence after all. That’s why it’s fine.”

“And you know?” Heidi continued to Masazumi, her face in a smile.

“I find how super filthy he is with money rather wonderful, but he has other good parts you know?”

“Ah, that miser, he’s very dirty even with the stocks, his drafts, projections and trades, no?”

“No, Toori-kun, you must not praise him that much!”

Heidi was wriggling with hands to her cheeks; but listening to the metallic sounds of conflict in the distance, she lowered her eyebrows. Then, pulling out one of her own sign frames she said:

“They may say a lot about him, but Shiro-kun’s super dirty concerning my birthday, you know?”

A bitter smile.

“He always stops by the living room after work, turns his head at times to make sure I’m with him when we’re walking, listens to my problems, and a lot of other things. ...He’s just plain super dirty to me. He’s always so eager to talk where money is involved, but he never says a word about me. Still...”

Heidi displayed something on her sign frame. It looked like a map of a part of the left ship of Musashi, the place where Shirojiro was fighting. Processing that image by writing rows of characters, Heidi said...

“I’m also super dirty towards Shiro-kun, you know?”

With a smile, she sent her input data on the sign frame.

Jizuri Suzaku and Shirojiro were actively contesting each other while cracking their fists.

“How naive, Shirojiro! No, should I use the nickname the Testament Union gave you, ‘Poker Face’?”

Naomasa swung her right mechanical arm. With that movement, Jizuri Suzaku’s upper body turned.

“Your weapon is nothing but ‘power’. However, every one of Suzaku’s blows... its arms, its legs, each of their movements has a ‘technique’ that lets its wrath or support come through!”

The fight between ether and iron slowly started to lean in the iron’s direction.

“—!!”

Jizuri Suzaku retracted its left leg, lightly tilted its body forward and took control of its balance. As if swinging him down from the right shoulder, the God of War pushed Shirojiro down in one movement.

Naomasa looked over in Shirojiro’s direction. Behind him were the residential areas on the surface of the ship.

She knew little of the land except the fact that the richer people lived there.

Still, Naomasa thought. I have the advantage here.

Right now, over here, because of the labor interference from the Engineering Club’s side, her strength would have no effect on the residences by this road. No matter how hard she tried, she would not damage her surroundings.

In reality, she had already acted several times in that assumption. She used the buildings as platforms to kick and increase her speed, as well as support for Suzaku’s foothold. Any building more than two floors in height would serve as good support that could withstand its body.

Aiming for that, Naomasa chose this very road for the battlefield. They had passed through here when they were shopping yesterday after all, so she knew that this was a good place to use in God of War battles.

However, no such labor interference was applied to Shirojiro. Without any platforms and supports on his side, he would have to hold back his power every

time his back was against the buildings.

Acting against that handicap in battle, the God of War executed its “technique” associated with itself.

...I may be on par with your “power”, but everywhere else I have the overwhelming advantage!

Right now it was time for the technique. Studying under a teacher in a martial arts dojo where she worked part-time, Naomasa could understand: right now, her breaking the balance in their exchange of blows would mean the downfall of her opponent.

Therefore she acted to that extent. Naomasa suddenly tilted Jizuri Suzaku’s fist downwards, the one she was using to crash against Shirojiro’s.

“...!”

Shirojiro tried to lower his body, but he didn’t make it in time.

As if to cover Shirojiro’s ether fist with its own, Suzaku’s iron fist came down from above. On the ground, Shirojiro was holding it back using his fists.

Drawing his own fists back, Shirojiro stepped on the pump and...

“Guh!”

Fell over.

Facing that figure in school uniform, Jizuri Suzaku readied its left hand. It intended to push down Shirojiro, sprawled on the floor, from above.

“This will decide it...!”

However, the open palm of the iron giant that swung down with her shout felt a certain response.

Its fingers were spread, but they did not reach Shirojiro.

“...!?”

The moment Naomasa wondered why, she saw it with her eyes. The ground Shirojiro was on had a depression in it.

Its area was around two tatami mats. The woodwork making up the surface

slid down around a meter in that area.

This is strange, Naomasa thought. The woodwork making up the surface was a very important part of the Musashi's surface structure. It's not something anyone can easily tear off. Her group in the Engineering Club would periodically be rounded up to maintain, repair and install new parts of the framework after all.

Still, it broke off and sank.

The reason it could was visible in front of her. On the sign frame displayed in front of Shirojiro's face, the map of the neighborhood they were in was displayed.

...That is-...

"No, did you buy the land on this road!?"

"To top it off, I bought the labor force needed to perform this removal as well. It did hurt my wallet a bit, though."

Shirojiro, standing inside that depression serving as his foothold, was out of reach of the God of War's hands.

Realizing its shift in balance, Jizuri Suzaku panicked and took a step back.

Right then Shirojiro gave chase.

Jumping out from the hole with the power of 150 Guard Unit members, he swung his right fist with all his might.

"...Gh!!"

"Jizuri Suzaku, protect the front!"

The God of War responded. However, even with both its arms up, the attack caused Jizuri Suzaku to shake.

A low metallic sound echoed. If she stepped to the back, buildings were nearby.

...Will I be cornered by the houses at this rate!?

The buildings may not break, but because of that, if he cornered her against the buildings she'd be forced to take the entire force of his attacks without any

option to dodge.

...Just one more step!

In front of her roughly measuring eyes, Shirojiro landed and prepared his second attack.

In order to avoid being wall-slammed, she needed drop her guard and send forth a fist of her own.

However, at the same time the God of War swung its fist, the foothold Shirojiro was on sank suddenly.

“Another one!? ...How much money are you planning on using!?”

Shirojiro entered a lowered position and went for another attack.

...Depending on the situation, he could also have the ability to take away my footing as well.

Therefore, to prevent that from happening, Naomasa made a choice.

Lowering down its hips, she entrusted Suzaku's stature to the buildings on its back.

The logic was simple. Lowering down its hips will allow the God of War to execute low punches, and if she relies on the buildings, even if Suzaku's footing is taken away, its balance won't easily be lost.

Even for someone like Shirojiro, he would not be able to buy houses where people are living, so they would not break because of him.

She had the upper hand here.

That's why Naomasa moved. Leaving its back to the houses, the God of War launched an attack on the level of its chest.

Right in front of her. She went for a smashing attack on the figure of Shirojiro sunken in the hole of the floor.

She'd win if it connected.

Then, aiming for Shirojiro under its eyes, Jizuri Suzaku sent forth its fist while leaning to the back.

“Go...!”

The moment she screamed Shirojiro slowly spoke.

“It is your defeat, laborer.”

Right after that, Jizuri Suzaku became enveloped in a certain phenomenon.

On its back. The houses it leaned its back on did not stop its path of travel; receiving its whole weight, they broke down into pieces.

It was not only the buildings. Even the structural woodwork on the surface broke down all the way to the lower levels in one swing.

“What...!?”

Pressured by Jizuri Suzaku, the houses against its back warped. They distorted, creaked, then finally broke down and crashed.

...This is-...

It's impossible, Naomasa thought. Why did the houses still break when the labor interference was in effect?

Still, the creaking sounds of everything collapsing provided sufficient proof to her.

It's all breaking down.

The house that should have supported Suzaku's figure instead broke into pieces without carrying out its assumed role.

The bent structural woodwork recoiled, sending all the broken roofs, pillars and walls up into the sky.

With the sudden opening of space behind them, Jizuri Suzaku lost its balance to the back, and...

“Guh...!”

Trying to make it rise from the falling parts of the house, Naomasa made it struggle.

She couldn't. Due to the crash onto its back, Suzaku was sunken from the

waist up.

As if in response, the fragments of the buildings fell down into Musashi's inner quarters. Following suit, the back of the crimson Heavy God of War started sinking along with pieces of wood; but in response, it automatically grabbed Naomasa's body and held her up to the sky.

"...Jizuri Suzaku!?"

Right after that, with the sounds of collapse, the lower body and shoulders of the fallen God of War became enveloped in rubble.

Along with rubble, the God of War fell down all the way through one floor, underground.

Overwhelmed by the noise, Jizuri Suzaku could only let Naomasa get down on the ground.

The God of War tried to move, but it couldn't win against the weight of the rubble and how bad its balance was. Looking at that, Naomasa clicked her tongue; and while starting to brush away the broken parts from on top of the God of War, she thought:

...So the other side won, huh!? Still...

She was in doubt while hurrying to pull out the large pieces of wood to save her God of War.

"What is this all about! Why did the buildings that should be under protection from my labor not get that support from my team... Even the floor broke down as well!"

"The answer is easy. I bought it, and made it a property of mine in regards to this battle."

"You bought it!? This is a densely populated area, you know!?"

On the surface already above her, standing on the edge of the ruins, Shirojiro turned his gaze that was looking down on her up to the sky.

"I would not have trusted any information about real estate if it wasn't in

real-time. Look over there.”

In the blue sky, figures of aerial ships could be made out.

“There are non-citizens of Musashi that fled this ship after hearing the rumors of its transfer. As they leave, houses will be sure to become empty. Now, if I could find them...”

A breath.

“The rest is simple. I show the people how rich I am and how omnipotent the power of money is. Everything is in my plan to serve that purpose.”

Hearing that, Naomasa noticed something about how she moved through the roads all the way here while taking on Shirojiro’s attacks. During that time he was talking about a lot of things, explanations or otherwise, but...

...So that was to draw attention to him!?

“You drew attention to yourself so that I wouldn’t find out that your target houses weren’t inhabited, was it?”

“Surprises are prerequisite in business after all. I do not spare any part in my efforts.”

Before those words finished, a tremor arose.

It was Jizuri Suzaku attempting to escape the rubble under automatic maneuvers.

At the sounds of the generator and the pulses of the God of War felt through her soles, Naomasa let out a sigh of relief. Brushing away the large pieces of rubble, she helped Jizuri Suzaku to its feet; and then posed a question to the businessman above her.

“So, what do you want? From the Engineering Club, I mean.”

“Work.”

Shirojiro’s reply was immediately heard amidst the spectacle, which was quieting down.

“For Musashi to collect money, it must continue to fly without problems. To that extent, the work of the Engineering Club will become essential. In other

words, without the club, money will not come in; and for people like us, it will be as if all our weapons are lost. That's why...you're one of us, Naomasa."

Shirojiro then opened up a sign frame. To the reflection of Heidi's relieved face in the screen, he spoke.

"Heidi. Get the people around to help the God of War up, but keep the costs down."

The surprised voices resounding in town, along with the movement of the people saving the God of War, reached the top of the bridge in front of the Academy.

On that bridge, off which the voices spilled out below it, Heidi let out a sigh; she wiped the sweat from her forehead and looked to her sides.

To her right, Toori was already gone. He was heading off to be with the others by the school building.

To her left, Masazumi was, along with Mitotsudaira, loosening their shoulders as expected.

"...It's over, huh."

Judge. Mitotsudaira affirmed, her shoulders lightly tapped by Heidi. She quickly went over to the stairs.

"Hey, get that part over there done first!"

"She's just using others, huh. ...In any case, it looks like it's time for us to take over."

With a bitter smile, Mitotsudaira saw Heidi off and turned her gaze to Masazumi at her side.

"So I'll be going next, then."

"Will you be okay? I know little about the position of knights in this day and age, so I cannot support you."

"There's nothing for you to worry about. No matter what happens, I will deal with it as a knight. Therefore... The rest is all up to my opponent."

Saying that, Mitotsudaira looked to her back.

Towards the school building. She turned to face everyone in that direction. Sharpening the glance of her golden eyes, she began:

“Representing the knights of Musashi, I – Nate ‘Argent Loup’ Mitotsudaira – will now ask.”

Sticking out her chest, Mitotsudaira placed the pair of long cases she was carrying on the ground to her sides. The cases that were about her height in length hit the ground, their weight causing the bridge to creak a little.

Then Mitotsudaira placed her hands on the twin cases on the ground.

“Right now, the rights of the president and chancellor are in the hands of the king, meaning such positions are not present here and now. With a duty to stand by as he ordered, and no economic foundation to compensate for it, we knights are not able to abide by your actions. With regards to this situation... What does the Academy’s side hold that will make us follow your decision?”

She grabbed both of the cases, one in each hand.

They were thick cases. Her thin fingers looked like they were just touching the cases’ sides, as if they went behind them. However, as Mitotsudaira easily handled them...

“See here?”

Below her feet the bridge creaked and, as if to substitute for it, the cases were lifted up.

Taking up the load, she neither set up her shoulders nor did her hips sink; she just held them up. With neither pain nor fatigue showing on her body, as if holding pieces of twig, she lightly brought those twin cases to a horizontal position with her arms, as if clinging to them.

It wasn’t a technique. Around where her fingers held the cases, wrinkles formed as if they were cloth, distorted slightly in shape. It was raw strength.

“My mother was a werewolf (Loup Garou). I myself cannot perform a transformation (Bête de Modulation), but...that part aside, though, I can exert as much power as how it would have been at any moment. You do know about

that, right, everyone?”

A moment passed. With a smile of inquiry...

“I was quite the mischievous child back then, was I not?”

Saying that, she placed both cases on her shoulders, and spread her legs shoulder wide.

“Now,” she prefaced, and then Mitotsudaira posed a question to everyone by the Academy.

“Who will be the one to make a knight submit?”

Chapter 29: Musashi's Knights

CHAPTER 29

"Musashi's Knights"



That existence.

A sentiment?

Or necessity?

Point Allocation (Chivalry)

That existence

A sentiment?

Or necessity?

Point Allocation (Chivalry)

On top of the bridge in front of the Academy, Mitotsudaira took in a breath.

...I requested an opponent, so let's see what will happen now.

Thinking that, looking at everyone on the other side, she started thinking about the possibilities.

About the person that would come out to respond to her request for an opponent.

...Not the chancellor, I would guess.

He was not a person with fighting ability, no matter how you looked at it. People would stop him if he were to nominate himself.

Shirojiro and Naomasa were not with them, so if we're talking about dueling-types, it would be someone like Tenzou or Urquiaga.

They were the ones taking on spirit exorcism cases to gain combat experience after all, to follow in their family's business or for their own career path.

Mitotsudaira herself had started fighting to drive stuff like that away in middle school. The territory of Mito which the ship annually lands on was a place ghosts and the like were fond of after all, with all the wasteland and marshes. Even at the other ports, work like that came in mountains.

Especially with the recent increase in Phenomena, causing even the other knights to go out many times.

Though spirit in nature, the experience you get fighting living dead-type opponents is similar to that of facing human ones. Fights with those who survived those kinds of battles would surely be interesting.

...Yes, I have already prepared for such a case. It's just that...

“...What is everyone doing?”

Everyone was sitting in front of the Academy talking to each other, but no one came out from among them.

She had already given them time and waited, so what was happening?

“Umm...”

The moment Mitotsudaira tilted her head and called out to them, from the seated crowd of people Toori’s head turned and gave her a reply.

“Ah, Nate, some thinking time, thinking time~! Don’t cut the time~.”

Before she nodded, everyone looked in her direction for a moment, then returned to putting their heads together.

“Hey, what are we going to do? Nate sure is eager to do this, huh.”

“Hmm... I did bring some poison on my own, so should I use that...?”

“Or rather, Mito is a mid-close ranged fighter, so how about I as a long ranged fighter take a bow and snipe...”

“In my opinion, we should just wait until Shirojiro returns and get him to buy some silver bullets...”

“Even Mitotsudaira is out of my scope of interest, so I’ll pass. Leave me out of this, please!”

...Disregarding the last one, these people are seriously going for the kill, huh!?

Being wary of the feeling of discontent rising inside her as an emotion of rage, Mitotsudaira frowned and let out a voice.

“...Can you not hurry up!?”

To the demand of the female knight standing on the bridge as if to occupy it, everyone in front of the entrance once again brought their heads together and groaned.

In the group, Toori whispered “right.”

“I thought of something good. Tenzou. Prostrate in front of her.”

“Y-you cannot prostrate in front of someone without a reason! Mitotsudaira-dono is not the kind to get a joke like that, so we can’t just kneel down on the floor...”

“Hmm, then, should I go out?”

Urquiaga searched his chest, making several metallic sounds in the process. Making a short sigh, he...

“If we decide to save Horizon after this, I will not be able to act.

“Whatever the case, my ambition is to become part of the Inquisition; and neither the Catholics of K.P.A Italia nor those of Tres España are heretics that I can fight. I will not be able to lay a hand on them.”

“Ah, me neither, just like him.”

Adele raised her hand. Rolling up her oversized uniform sleeves, she said: “I am a retainer. We retainers serve knights, so opposing our own knight will mean losing the meaning of my position.”

“Work sure is tough, huh.”

Folding his arms, Toori nodded and then moved his gaze to Neshinbara.

“Neshinbara, you look like you have something to say. What is it?”

“Ah, right. It’s just that something doesn’t feel right here.”

Neshinbara stole a glance towards Mitotsudaira and returned his eyes to everyone.

“I wonder what reason does a knight like her have to fight and test the values of civilians like us?”

“If I may answer, I’m an idiot, so I don’t know.”

“Right, I would guess. I’m glad you understand. Yep. ...Ha ha, I’m sorry.”

“H-he didn’t even deny it! You even pitied me, didn’t you...this guy! Ah, those eyes are those of pity, aren’t they!?”

Everyone held Toori down. Noticing Mitotsudaira tilting her head on the other side, Kimi said: “Heh heh heh. Mitotsudaira, you’re afraid of not knowing what we’re talking about, aren’t you?”

“No, well, it’s just like what I see every day, but... Looking at it from outside, I would normally be scared.”

At her words, everyone once again brought their heads together. They tentatively affirmed and made contact with each other.

“Even Mito said that our group is pretty scary. I don’t understand.”

“In my opinion, A busty-type shrine maiden with one machine eye like Asama-san saying that would be more of the question.”

“I would question why a glasses-wearing, baggy-type retainer like you would say that as well, Adele.”

“Ha ha ha. Uqui-dono, funny you should say that, being a half-dragon inquisitor yourself.”

“Heh heh heh. This ninja hasn’t looked at himself lately, has he? What are you hiding from yourself?”

“Hey, you guys! You guys! Don’t just change the subject without me! What’s with this fun atmosphere leaving me out!? I’ll suck all of it in, alright!? Sniff sniff sniff sniff!”

Everyone glared at the idiot with serious faces. In response Toori was going to say something, but hung his head and lay down sideways.

Ignoring Toori going limp, Asama lightly clapped her hands.

“Now, let’s continue our conversation while we still have the time. Neshinbara-kun, what are you concerned about with Mito?”

“Ah, right. I looked up material regarding historical connections, and...”

“Ah? You’re speaking again? Hey, hey, won’t you make it so an idiot like me could understand? Neshinbara, you have that habit of not getting to the point after all. Make it super simple for us just this once, ’kay?”

In response to the recovered Toori’s words, Neshinbara’s smiling face popped up a vein.

Then, Kimi lightly beat on Toori’s head.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, an otaku like him loves nothing more than

showing off his knowledge; so you should let him speak as he wants to, alright? If you say anything weird you'll be caught up in his world of madness, you know?"

"Look in the mirror, sister!!"

"Ah, well, I'm used to it so it's fine."

Neshinbara waved his hand and said:

"Looking at it from a historical standpoint, knights being a class above the people is a natural thing."

"...Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Well..." Neshinbara lowered his body, everyone following suit.

"Knights are people with influence. At least...their positions are above the public."

"So?"

"Don't you think it's weird? Why would those knights be here, facing off against us? Their status is higher than ours, you know? If I have to put it in words, they are the ones ruling over us. To say nothing about our face-off, to us civilians the other side is higher...so why did they choose to confront us? They'll lose a lot if we win, you know?"

At that question, everyone stole a glance towards Mitotsudaira.

Realizing that she was being looked at, Mitotsudaira pulled back a bit.

"W-what is it?"

Everyone nodded and returned their gaze. With a pointed glance, Urquiaga looked over everyone.

"Is she thinking like this? Because of the crisis Musashi is involved in... Mitotsudaira's destructive urges are lighting up and quickly making her want to go wild."

"...Wow. What would make her do something like that?"

"That's right. That's a bit pushing it, you know. Besides, Mito said that she herself is representing the knights. There's no way anything would

simultaneously incite the knights to act, is there?”

“Umm, I feel like you’re saying that it’s definitely the case if she’s by herself, but...”

With a troubled face, Adele tilted her head.

“I wonder. There’s definitely something weird here.”

“Hey Nate, Adele is saying that something is weird in youoah...!”

“I-it’s nothing, alright!? Kimi-dono, should I just hit you now?”

“...Umm, I don’t care, but can you hurry on with it?”

Everyone made excuses saying “just a bit, just a bit more, alright?” and...

“Right, Adele-dono, please continue.”

“Judge. There’s the thing Secretary said, about whether there really is a need for conflict. I mean, well, knights and retainers don’t fight with the people in the first place.”

Tilting her head for the second time, the girl continued.

“About the problem of class difference that Secretary said. There’s the question of the higher-class knights wanting to fight the people, but this duel questions even the context of the knights’ very existence.”

At Adele’s words, everyone stopped their actions and voices.

Then all of them once again looked at Mitotsudaira without saying anything.

“...Like I said, what is it?”

“Hmm,” thus everyone nodded and again looked at each other.

“Not like we can ask her. ...About that, how this duel involves not only herself, but the whole meaning of the knights’ existence; what do you mean by that, Adele?”

“Judge. Well, this is about the knights of Musashi, though. ...Actually, according to the historical recreation described by the Testament, at the later period of the Middle Ages, around two hundred years back, the feudal system

of dedicating land to the knights and kings broke down for the most part.

“The age we’re in now falls within the Imperial Court system that offers them authority and assets.”

Right, Neshinbara nodded. He looked at Adele and gestured his thanks.

“In the later Middle Ages, in order to bring an end to the chaos brought about by the resource exhaustion of the Crusades, and with the rise of the trend of saving money as well as the religious revolution, many countries started centralizing their power around a single head of the nation: the king.

“With war changing into a large-scale activity where the strength of knights will not be sufficient, where many battles are fought by mercenaries, we’re entering the age of the armed forces.

“Any country other than the Far East has already started making the whole student body of their Academies into armed forces by making lessons in war compulsory for them.”

“Heh heh heh. Looks like the otaku is already starting to derail from the point with his explanation.”

“...As it is, the story isn’t over yet.”

Neshinbara showed a grin, a vein popped up on his head.

“...The knights under the feudal system cast away their weapons with the formation of the armed forces and started participating in political, economical and military affairs. They were becoming a new entity, the Imperial Court. They would then be given court ranks by those with influence, but those without anything like that are still called knights at the present time. However...”

However...

“The Far East is still under the feudal system as of now, and Musashi does not have any form of armed force; so the knights sent to Musashi are still under their system from the Middle Ages: being part of the feudal nobility. With the ‘Allocation of Expenses for the Purpose of Privatization’ passed on by Musashi, for the people outside the Far East to accept their responsibility for the protection, distribution of goods and social welfare of the residential areas in

their vicinity, they assumed the role of managing their land; they also held the duty of performing a sortie in emergencies as well.

“Thus, at the present time, while Musashi’s knights have paid for themselves and are undergoing naturalization over here, for them to display their cooperation and absence of hostility towards the Testament Union they would have to remain under the Far East’s feudal system as part of the feudal nobility. In other words, they would continue to act like knights of the Middle Ages.”

Judge, Adele said.

“The Far East cannot possess weaponry, but the knights as well as us retainers would succeed our families’ lines of work and be able to hold our own weapons to ‘cooperate with the Testament Union’, so we are a rare commodity. ...The knights residing in the Musashi without armed forces are not members of the Imperial Court protected by the armed forces, but knights of the Middle Ages who protect the people themselves.”

Even so...

“Thinking from the perspective of the knights’ existence... Why would a knight, responsible for protecting the people, want to duel with the people themselves?”

The moment Adele presented the problem, Toori said out of the blue:

“Well, there’s a lot to think about here, as Neshinbara and Adele said. ...In short, Nate is higher than us, but would normally have to protect us, is it?”

“Eh? Ah, yes, judge, that’s right. Mitotsudaira-san is a knight after all.”

To Adele’s answer, Toori nodded twice.

Then, with a smile filling up his face, he said:

“Then, this duel here has a reason; and if we were to satisfy that reason, Nate would become our ally and protect us, is it?”

Toori stretched once, then widened his smile.

Everyone was looking at him, but he didn’t look back. Instead, looking at Mitotsudaira on the other side of the bridge tilting her head unknowing of their exchange, he said: “I’m relieved. If Nate became our enemy, we would have

quite the problem after all.”

To his words, everyone wanted to say something. However...

“ ...”

No one said anything, responding only with the loosening of their shoulders.

In response, Toori looked over to Adele.

“Adele, who are the knights currently in high school?”

“...Well, the only knight there is Mitotsudaira-san.”

Adele showed a troubled smile.

“Thirty-one knights are present on the whole of Musashi, but most of them are either older or those in primary or middle school, or even younger. After we graduate, there won’t be any knights in our Academy for 4 years or so. ...There are a lot of us retainers though, around six of us in high school.”

Uhm, Tenzou nodded along with Asama, Urquiaga, Naruze and Naito.

“A rare character, huh...”

“No, um, I think the five of you are quite rare as well.”

“No, if we’re talking about rarity...”

As Asama turned her head around, everyone else looked towards the Academy building. Over there, Persona-kun and Itoken, along with Nenji, were pouring Hassan’s curry into cups and drinking from them.

“Oh! Delicious, Hassan-kun! I’m sure this will hold significance towards our role as people of Musashi!”

“That’s right~, bringing our daily activities to their full flavor with curry is nice~.”

“The joy we are having without a care towards our nationalities will surely show our hospitality as one of the people...!”

“ ...”

Returning their gazes from those four, everyone whispered.

“I wonder how Persona-kun drinks. Also, now that I think of it, rather than

Persona-kun, he's more of a Helm-kun, huh."

"In Nai-chan's opinion, Nenji drinking curry makes him look like vomit inside Uiro, doesn't it?"

"Margot, apologize to the people of Nagoya. Also, Nenji will look like that no matter what he eats."

"Rather than that, you guys, don't put off the convo more than I could. The meaning of my existence could be taken away, you know?"

Saying that, Toori lay down on the floor looking up at the clouds traveling across the sky.

"Well then, should we have Nate face off against someone?"

"...Who will be the one, though?"

"We have our terms, no? According to what we've been talking about. All that's left is to nominate someone."

Toori smiled and then continued.

"Someone like Nate needs to reflect over her own actions, you know."

Mitotsudaira was waiting.

...No matter the person, I'd like to finish this as soon as I can.

It's a painful decision, she thought; and Mitotsudaira sighed in her heart, how troublesome.

That moment, the people over by the campus building unexpectedly stood up and formed another scrum.

"Right."

With Toori's words, the scrum disbanded and the opponent came out from inside them.

The opponent at the end of Mitotsudaira's gaze, the one slowly walking towards her was...

"...Eh?"

It was Suzu.

In the middle of Mitotsudaira's field of vision, Suzu was walking.

Due to the sensors on her hair and hips, she seemed to be aware of where her opponent was.

Suzu was unexpectedly approaching her without any hesitation in her steps. However...

...Eh?

"U-umm..."

Mitotsudaira looked over to the people behind Suzu.

"H-hold on, what is the meaning of this!? Even though I desire an opponent to face off with..."

Her voice quieted down.

In front of her, several meters before her position, Suzu stopped moving and covered both her ears with her hands. Her slender body cowered slightly, but never retreated.

"U-umm... your voice, w-was loud."

The same time Mitotsudaira was shocked, everyone on the other side in front of the Academy building similarly covered their ears with their hands and said.

"You're noisy~!"

...T-these people, I'll show you guys...!

Even while Mitotsudaira was thinking, Suzu, who timidly parted her hands from her ears, made sure that there was noise and continued walking over to her.

In one moment, Suzu reached just barely beyond arm's reach.

Phew. Sighing while coming to a standstill, she held her ears to the surroundings, determining that no one was there.

Therefore, as if to respond, Mitotsudaira held her arms to her hips, both cases

still in her hands.

“Umm, everyone? What is the meaning of this? I am seeking an opponent to duel with as a knight, you know.”

“U-umm, th-that’s, why.”

The response came from near her.

“I, c-came, b-by myself. I figured, I would, be the one, to, hear you out.”

“Eh? Umm, Suzu?”

Mitotsudaira began to grow impatient.

...No way...

She had a thought... *Did they find out...*

...The reason why I am here?

The knights of Musashi had made a decision to try and talk with them. This was to be the best decision they could make in regards to Musashi’s present condition.

However, in front of her, Suzu said:

“Let’s, fi...ght.”

“__”

Mitotsudaira held her breath and looked past Suzu.

Over the distance she looked through, tilting his head with Mitotsudaira’s movements, a figure was seated in front of everyone.

“Chancellor... You understood, didn’t you? The reason I am here.”

“No way, I don’t understand.”

With a smile, Toori continued.

“I’m not you, Nate. I didn’t hear anything from you. ...I can’t say I do despite that, no? What you could do, what is happening; I didn’t remember you explaining the least of that to us.”

Mitotsudaira swallowed her breath and raised her eyebrows.

“There’s no way...I’d tell you.”

“Then there you go, am I right?”

Mitotsudaira was lost for an answer.

...He definitely understood.

Affirming would mean they have agreed. Denying would be lying to herself. Then, rather than indicating an answer...

...For me to carry out what I should as the representative of the knights in this situation...

Thinking that, Mitotsudaira moved immediately by first opening her mouth.

“Representing the knights, as well as the feudal lords; I, Nate Mitotsudaira, have a proclamation to make to the people of our land.”

With those words, Mitotsudaira let go of the gigantic cases from her arms.

Neshinbara looked. Faster than the cases could hit the floor, Mitotsudaira closed her eyes and got down to one knee.

“We, Musashi’s knights...”

Her posture was that of greeting to Suzu in front of her, the one done on one knee. With the meaning of that one pose...

...This is-

Neshinbara hurried to look at the sitting Toori’s profile.

He was already tilting his head.

“This is bad.”

Hearing that voice, Neshinbara shouted.

“Mukai-kun, stop Mitotsudaira-kun!”

There was only one reason. The result everyone had predicted would happen.

“Musashi’s knights are planning to fight the people... They’re planning to lose!!”

Mitotsudaira silently affirmed the fact contained in Neshinbara's scream.

...Yes, that surely is the case.

The knight will lose to the commoner; what will such a thing entail.

...The knight and noble classes' influence will be thrown into disorder, initiating the rise of citizen authority.

According to the Testament, the day will come in England where a king will be brought down in a revolution by its people.

There have even been rumors that people are gathering power and going in that direction over in Hexagone Française. An end to involving the people in politics along with the royal family, to say. The return of the rise of the people, if only as a single communal movement.

...Then, in this scenario, if the knights of Musashi were to themselves submit to the commoners, the people would be put in a situational position to establish a revolution.

If they do, what will happen?

...The knights, left only in name, will become among the people.

As a result, there will not be any knights left on Musashi to protect the people.

That's just fine, Mitotsudaira thought.

The knights are strong. They are perceived as guardians, entities which people rely on.

However, Musashi's knights decided on one thing in the meeting this morning: *...The possibility of their existence fueling the people's intentions to oppose the Testament Union.*

If that were to happen, though, the knights and retainers would not be able to protect the whole town of Musashi.

Prioritizing the safety of the people, only one decision came to light.

We submit to the Union.

However, even that has its problems. That is...

...The safety of the people that will be relocated to other nations.

As Shirojiro pointed out, all Far Eastern finances outside of Musashi would have most likely already been dispossessed.

There would be no money; so then, they thought...

...We will elevate the status of Musashi's residents above those of other countries.

At the present time, other countries are under the hierarchical system of power centralized around the Chancellor's Officers and Student Council, with the chancellor and president as kings at the top. With such a strong convergence of power in the system, the ruling organization can put up a large-scale resisting force capable of dealing with the fiercely changing times of this generation.

However, the revolutions that will eventually come will change that trend of action. The people will gradually come to participate in a large fraction of political activities.

Thus, there has been a trend among the chancellors and presidents of countries to put off the Testament's historical recreation related to the rise of the people, in order to protect their rights and policies as kings.

However, the people are waiting for the time of revolution, leaving the nation under the care of their kings until then.

Under such conditions, what would happen with Musashi if the people were to successfully take down its knights?

The knights would lose their authority and become commoners, and in exchange, the people will claim their powers for themselves.

Under the Testament, such a revolution was not described in the history recreation of the Far East. No one has any idea if it should happen or not. Therefore, the very revolution itself will be a violation against the Testament.

...What, then, if the people involved in the revolution were to become residents of the countries they will be relocated to?

Inside those nations, “those involved in the revolution” will surely become part of the nations’ history recreations under the Testament. However much a country’s royalty were to deny revolutions, with the people who experienced such an event already residents of their nation, their views would mean nothing in the face of the Testament’s historical recreation.

The people of Musashi would surely bring down the royal families in their destinations, as the centers of revolutions.

That was the intention.

So Mitotsudaira continued, brought down to her knees and facing downward.

...We are...

“By the hands of Musashi’s people, are completely...”

...made to surrender, and declare our submission.

Those words will be the end. Still, she thought...

...I never thought Suzu would be my opponent.

With her declaration to fight, an opponent of considerable strength would come out. They would then fight for a bit, then she would declare her loss; that was what she thought.

No one would let such a naive course of events occur. Still...

“Made to...”

This is the end. If she were to declare her own defeat, it will be Suzu’s, no, a commoner’s victory. So she had to go.

“Surr...”

...ender. Right after she finished that word, Mitotsudaira heard Toori’s voice.

“Heeyy, Bell-san, can you stop Nate for us? Anything will do.”

“Eh? H-how, d-do I?”

“Hmm...rub her chest.”

...Having that done to me will be my real defeat!!

Subconsciously reacting to his suggestion in her heart, Mitotsudaira heard

sounds.

Two of them.

The first was the dull sound of the two cases crashing to the ground.

In succession, Suzu panicked and took a step forward.

“Ah.”

The second was that of her body cowering in response to the heavyweight cases cracking the floor.

With her step forward throwing her shrunken body out of balance, she fell forward in front of Mitotsudaira.

“...!?”

In front of her, she felt Suzu extending her hand forward as she fell. The sound of a small breath escaping her throat like a cry could also be heard. However, Mitotsudaira opened her mouth.

...What I should do now is...

Once again declare her surrender. Still, what she heard was...

“M-Mito...tsudai...ra-san.”

...What am I saying?

When you're falling over, letting out a cry at me.

Trying to say something.

Electing herself despite having no fighting ability, trying to say something while ignoring her falling over...

“U-umm...”

This cannot be, Mitotsudaira thought. At this rate, before she finishes her words, Suzu will fall to the ground.

Still, Suzu only said a little more. It immediately reached Mitotsudaira's ears from her mouth as she fell.

That one word shook, but reached her as if to grip her thoughts.

“Save me...!”

She could not understand the intention behind those words.

Still, Mitotsudaira opened her mouth. Something must be said before all else.

As a knight, in front of a commoner. She was here to say it, after all.

So Mitotsudaira spoke from her throat, clearly, her thoughts as a knight.

That was.

“Don’t worry.”

One moment letting out her innermost thoughts, Mitotsudaira said.

“Who do you think I am?”

Saying that, she raised her body and took half a step forward.

Brushing her sleeves, she received Suzu’s body and absorbed the impact into her upper body. At that, Mitotsudaira bent her body back slightly, effectively stopping Suzu’s fall.

...I’ve done it now...

She understood that her action meant kicking their “best decision” to the curb.

Still, the sensation of relief she held in her arms is definite.

Her figure becoming one holding Suzu up, Mitotsudaira drew a breath.

In her arms, she felt the heart inside the small body she supported beat quickly; but it let out a sigh of relief.

She must have been frightened. She could feel her tremble slightly. Still, in her arms, Suzu hung her head and said.

“Thank you...”

“What are you saying? It’s only natural.”

I’m showing off a lot, she thought. She was plenty afraid as well but still...

“No matter what, the soul of a knight will definitely save the commoner. The

way of the knight is in fulfilling such duties after all.”

Saying that, Mitotsudaira looked in front of her. Seeing everyone, and Toori sitting in front of them, she thought: ...*Ah, this is just...*

If he were to cast aside Musashi’s hardships and decide to go and save the one person most important to him, Mitotsudaira, having saved Suzu herself, would have no reason to go against him.

What would the other knights think of this?

She did not know. Still, Mitotsudaira bent down to her knees, having made sure of herself.

Helping Suzu stand on her own, with a smile she said:

“Are you alright?”

“Nnn...”

Looking at Suzu nod, Mitotsudaira moved her gaze further forward.

She looked over to Toori, and lowered her head.

“Nate ‘Argent Loup’ Mitotsudaira, Knight of Musashi. I would like to join in the ranks of the chancellor’s command as the Fifth Special Duty of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Chancellor Officers.”

“Then, I’ll have to get back my rights as the chancellor, no?”

“Am I not to blame for anything?”

Her face with eyebrows raised in question was met by Toori’s smile. He then continued.

“I did owe you something from yesterday, no?”

“Owe?”

“Yep. You did let me fondle your chest.”

Eh? The moment she thought. Around her, the students as well as everyone else looking over the situation from around the school; everyone shouted.

“Eh...!?”

“Wha-wai- no, you got it wrong! It’s not what you think!”

She couldn't stop everyone's noise. Experiencing the voices and expressions of the people around her, yet feeling no malice from them, Mitotsudaira thought...

...Seriously.

Feeling helpless as a knight, but not stopping the smile from forming on her lips, she looked over to Suzu, Toori and everyone else.

"If all of you want it so badly, I'll have no choice but to offer my strength as a knight, won't I?"

Still, Mitotsudaira looked behind her.

Masazumi appeared troubled, lowering her shoulders at the end of her gaze.

"That's the nature of your position, no? Not something I can say anything about, not knowing the way of the knights myself. Besides..."

She knew what she was going to say. Therefore, Mitotsudaira turned to look at Toori, and declared.

"This is my win. The superiority of knights above the people will not change."

"That's right. So we're at one win, one loss, huh?"

Judge, Mitotsudaira affirmed. There was the contradiction of stepping down from the stage after her win; but such things could happen to knights living in this day and age, she thought.

Mitotsudaira thus let out a voice loud enough for everyone making noise around her to hear.

"Masazumi, the rest is up to you. Your forte in debate and speech will decide everything, you know?"

The people's voices and motions did not just permeate the area around the Academy, but spread all the way to the other ships as well.

As her body stood in the wind brought about by the half-over afternoon, over on the bridge by the Academy, Masazumi fell into thought.

...This is where it really starts.

The people are no longer able to ignore their duels in this special student general meeting.

Their attention has already been attracted by the noise, if not the spectacle of Shirojiro and Naomasa's battle; even more so by Mitotsudaira's act which brought them closer to this confrontation.

The Broadcasting Committee's PR has already informed the public of those two battles, and that the next one will determine their conclusion.

So the people who have decided to watch this final duel have gone outside their houses, not intimidated by the risk of becoming involved in battle, and gathered in areas with a good view of the venue.

Shops are already taking advantage of the situation, setting up stalls in the streets and parks as well as setting out couches outside their premises; they had the sole intent to trade.

...Musashi's people are sensitive to developments on the ship.

Anyone would feel a sense of danger regarding continuing to live in the Far East. So...

...Even now, they are still in doubt of the point in staying here.

Drawing her breath, Masazumi held her arms together.

She was part of the parliament and king's side. The side that wished somehow to make up for the loss brought about by Mikawa's destruction, and avoid all-out war with the Testament Union. To that end, they are to accept Horizon Ariadust's suicide as the right thing to do as the current head of state, recognize Musashi's transfer as an act of substituting the ship for the destroyed Mikawa and completely transfer its people to their own countries.

...In contrast, the other side...

Refusing to accept Horizon Ariadust's suicide, wanting to protect Musashi...

...What are you going to do!?

It was obvious. They were going to save Horizon, even if it meant all-out war under the boundaries of fights between Academies. She could already see the cards they held, to a degree.

Even if Musashi possesses no weapons, the strength of a God of War is there, as well as the influx of money to the shrine made by people from the other countries; pretty much giving them the resources to be able to fight.

The knights have also vowed to protect the people, stating that in the case Musashi is transferred they will be able to inch the people towards starting revolutions in the other countries.

...However, none of those are realistic.

Few people have actually received training in combat, and no one knows how useful all that God of War and fighting power will actually be. Even the knights; with only dozens of members, there is no way they could possibly protect all of Musashi from the consequences of war.

The people are probably just fired up with the intention of opposing the Testament Union right now.

Looking from above, anyone would understand. Centering around the students, there were people getting in touch with others on their clerical handhelds. Still, that is just...

...Probably having discussions with their parents, huh.

The current world is one where students represent their countries. It would either be to trade the life of a nation's lord for its safety, or to fight to protect both the nation and its king, getting hurt and possibly dying to do so. Not one of them would not consult their family about this.

"This would be in my favor, then."

No parent would want their child to die, that was what she thought; the child would also feel the same.

To grow old rather than die; if a place of safety were prepared for those who would come to have that opinion, they would surely be able to excuse themselves from blame by saying that the death of their king and the downfall of their nation was inevitable.

Even so, the way they were discussing on their handhelds was...

...Shirojiro and Mitotsudaira's words must have rung in their hearts.

The people right now would think like this:

“We may lose, but...”

...To avoid the guilt of abandoning their lord, as well as to protect their money, they would “resist in an apparent way”; and if that were to fail, they would just proceed to start a revolution and bring the country down.

That is to say, they would try to put up a resistance for now and see what happened.

“How naive.”

They would never succeed. She had enough reasons to be able to say that.

“I will be showing them those reasons, huh.”

Saying that, Masazumi looked forward.

Beyond Mitotsudaira and Suzu standing in the middle of the bridge, the rest of the class was there.

...Opponents, huh.

Were they her friends before this? Even now, she never really knew.

All that happened was that Mitotsudaira looked over to her and said.

“Masazumi, even now you still have a chance, so...”

“You don’t need to hold out your hand to me. It’s going to be my turn, after all.”

She showed her affirmation and escorted the knight off of the stage.

“Mitotsudaira, the way of the knight appeared to me as a form of sentimentalism similar to willpower.”

“Judge. That’s why we often become intoxicated with our passion.”

“I see. It may be different in nature, but the feudal system of warriors still exists in the Far East. It’s still fine for knights to be here, in my honest opinion. So, Mitotsudaira, don’t mind me and go. I am no longer...”

She continued.

“One of the people you should protect.”

“Judge.”

Then Mitotsudaira sent out a greeting.

She left. Suzu, her shoulders held by the knight, looked over at her; but Masazumi didn't mind.

She had more pressing matters to pay attention to.

Behind her.

She heard a sound.

The sound of people making noise, the sound of a carriage moving on the pavement and the sound of hooves.

...They came, after all.

“You're not someone I can count on, are you? I am here to observe, should I say.”

Turning her head, there was a group of carriages on the stone pavement below the Academy.

They were horse carriages belonging to the members of Musashi's Provisional Council.

One, two, three, four; the numbers continued to increase, passing the two-digit mark.

Intimidated by the number of carriages forming lines by the sides of the road, the people there fell into silence. As if to substitute for that, the sound of the carriages and the hooves...

“—!”

As well as the neighs of the horses filled the air; stopping in the leading position was her father's carriage.

“Now.”

Masazumi once again folded her arms and turned back to everyone else.

“...Shall we start the final duel?”

There was an arrangement of tatami mats in the middle of a prairie.

Below the light passing through the ceiling, with a round table and a teacup, it was a six-unit arrangement furnished with cushion seats.

Three sides of the arrangement were surrounded by a wall of pale light, with the fourth one blocked off with an iron wall.

There was a figure of a person resting her back on the iron wall reading a book on the tatami mats.

It was Horizon in her casual clothes.

Books were piled up to her sides. Three volumes to the right, three to the left. The books to the right had their backs face up, while the left-side ones were placed with their front covers face up.

Reading her book, Horizon unconsciously cast her gaze outside.

“ ... ”

Beyond the walls of light covering three of four sides, there was a spacious field. On that land filled with short grass, figures in red uniforms carrying spears and rifles were standing according to their ranks. There was some distance, but they were surrounding her position.

In front of her, determined to be north from the way the sun cast shadows, over by the distance were a number of ships; beyond which was a slope leading to mountains and valleys.

To her left, the west, was the same.

To her right, the east, beyond the fields and ships was a slope leading to the sea. The sea which periodically shone a light up to the sky.

Even now, light traveled from the sea to the sky, along with a faint shake of the land. Swaying her head as if to match the beat of the tremors, the speaker behind her in the wall suddenly let out a voice. It was the voice of the female student in charge of her care.

“How are you feeling?”

At the question, Horizon raised her head. She looked at the speaker and said:

“Judge. To be direct, there are no observed abnormalities. Is anything the matter?”

“Ah, no, we are currently scanning your body. That is all, Princess.”

Hearing that, Horizon recalled the time back when she had her body inspected on Musashi at the shopkeeper woman and Masazumi’s recommendation.

During the inspection with the female engineer in charge, she wondered.

“Is it fine for me to have my clothes on?”

“Tes. The analysis procedure is essentially that used to examine large-type spirits, so selective scanning of the important areas is possible...”

Saying up until that point, along with the sound of her panicked motions, the female student continued.

“I-I’m sorry. Um, please forget about that...! If you would hear us out, we do not think of treating you the same way as a spirit, Princess!”

“So it will be fine if I continue reading my book, will it not?”

“...Tes.”

Then that is fine; thinking this, Horizon returned her gaze to the book.

That moment, far into the north, she heard a sound.

“——”

A group of sounds, Horizon determined. Sounds she had heard recently. During Mikawa’s destruction last night, the people had certainly made a similar noise. That was when she was with them; but if they had been far away, this is what it would have sounded like.

...However.

Horizon thought of a problem.

The noise from last night was because of Mikawa’s destruction.

Then, why would a similar one be made right now?

She didn’t know.

There is a lot I do not know, Horizon thought and continued to think: *...If you do not forget the question, will the answer someday appear?*

Her own nature, her past, what she should do; her obtaining the truth about these things as well as her understanding of them were probably because she never forgot to question them. If that wasn't the case, she wouldn't even notice the answer in front of her. She would not understand, nor would she accept, left only to go with the flow of events.

The way she is now, she would already understand what she herself should do; so she thinks.

She may have no memories, nor does she have experience, but the books she read have taught her.

The way a lord of the Far East would account for the mistakes of his country in the present generation.

The one who caused Mikawa to fall last night was her father, so she heard.

She didn't know who he was, but a father is a relative; a parent of hers. This was also in the books she read.

Hence, what one should do when she loses her parents is...

...I do not know.

There were different cases in the books she read.

There were people who cried, there were those who laughed, and there were those who felt relief.

Statistically, it would be something sorrowful; but that emotion itself...

...Most of my emotions were made into Logismoi Óplo, so there is none in me.

Then this would surely remain a mystery to her.

What she did know was that to correct the mistakes her father made, she needed to pay with her life.

The best decision. Going by that, people will be saved and given relief.

It was written in the books.

Still, Horizon had a thought about the conversation she had with the female student acting as the court lady. That was...

...Below the best decision...is something there?

Another option, crushed in favor of the best.

What came to her mind was the scenery of the bakery.

The best decision was no longer in her reach.

“I wonder. If there was something that would show that to you, then...”

Horizon, thinking of the existence of a choice she cannot hope for, stated.

“It would have to deny my best decision and have a duel with me.”

Study: **Musashi's Knights**

●Musashi's Knights●



"Nee-chan! Nee-chan! About the foreigner thing from last time, just what is the knight rank like on Musashi? Why are people like Nate needed here in the Far East?"



"Fufufu, denying the existence of your classmate, idiot brother? It is certainly something to question, though. Basically, the knights on Musashi are those dispatched by the Testament Union."



"Dispatch Knight? Ah, you mean the Knight Eraser from Patchman, popular with the big kids? If the brats from elementary school finds out about him, my Masked Knight will be in major trouble in our matches! Where did the 'Dis' go, though?"



"Fufufu, your forced foolishness is amazing, immature brother. See, in the Far East including Musashi, there are people living here who have been exiled for having bad relations with their countries. However, if such people were to gather, not only will they be a threat to the Union, but our own Far East will become further less well regarded, no?"



"Ah, I see! I've been thought of as an erotic person because I have such an erotic sister, after all! Right, I'll do my best to answer to everyone's expectations!"



"Fufufu, think about how the people around us see me for having a fool of a brother as well, idiot brother. Anyway, knights holding no official positions, territories or the like are sent to the Far East and Musashi to keep an eye on such people. With an indefinite period, you might say they're really just getting rid of knight-rank people who don't have any use."



"Hey, Nee-chan, you're saying Nate is useless? Look down on Mito and she'll soak you in natto, you know?"



"You should kneel in Mito's direction. Besides, Mitotsudaira is here to succeed her name, not something I would call useless, you know?"

Anyway, they gradually took on the role of unifying the people in their area, managing their territory own their own like real knights used to do as well as being involved in economic activities. If one could afford it, a knight can buy his own land and be set for life, becoming not a 'knight of the Union' but an 'independent knight'. Still, the Union has warned them against thinking of rebelling, so the Far East needed to get on its good side by doing things like relieving part of its economic burden via the knights' self governance. Thus the two sides held talks, leading to the knights naturalizing themselves by purchasing land, taking on leading positions in the area and carrying out the duty as the Testament Union's surveillance through their generations. Hence, they came to hold a two-fold position: as landlords of the Far East and as knights of their own respective nations. Understanding that the knights do wish to avoid conflict with them, the Union has agreed to back their existence as the 'knight class' as well as their rights.

With that, the knights have come into existence as landlords in the Far East. Do you understand?"



"...Ah, sorry, Nee-chan, can you turn back for a bit? If you can, umm, ...From the 'Nee-chan! Nee-chan!' part, one more time."



"Are you thinking of doing this from the beginning and making all of this in vain?"

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! About the foreigner thing from last time, just what is the knight rank like on Musashi? Why are people like Nate needed here in the Far East?

Kimi: Fufufu, denying the existence of your classmate, idiot brother? It is certainly something to question, though. Basically, the knights on Musashi are those dispatched by the Testament Union.

Toori: Dispatch Knight? Ah, you mean the Knight Eraser from Patchman, popular with the big kids? If the brats from elementary school find out about him, my Masked Knight will be in major trouble in our matches! Where did the 'Dis' go, though?

Kimi: Fufufu, your forced foolishness is amazing, immature brother. See, in the Far East (including Musashi), there are people living here who have been exiled for having bad relations with their countries. However if such people were to gather, not only would they be a threat to the Union, but our own Far East would become even less well regarded, no?

Toori: Ah, I see! I've been thought of as an erotic person because I have such an erotic sister, after all! Right, I'll do my best to live up to everyone's expectations!

Kimi: Fufufu, think about how the people around us see me for having a fool of a brother as well, idiot brother. Anyway, knights holding no official positions, territories or the like are sent to the Far East and Musashi to keep an eye on such people. With an indefinite posting, you might say they're really just getting rid of knight-rank people who don't have any use.

Toori: Hey, Nee-chan, you're saying Nate is useless? Look down on Mito and she'll soak you in natto, you know?

Kimi: You should kneel in Mito's direction. Besides, Mitotsudaira is here to succeed her name, not something I would call useless, you know? Anyway, they gradually took on the role of unifying the people in their area, managing their territory on their own like real knights used to do as well as being involved in economic activities. If one can afford it, a knight can buy his own land and be set for life, becoming not a 'knight of the Union' but an 'independent knight'.

Still, the Union has warned them against thinking of rebelling; so the Far East needed to get on its good side by doing things like relieving part of its economic burden via the knights' self-governance. Thus the two sides held talks, leading to the knights naturalizing themselves by purchasing land, taking on leading positions in the area and carrying out the duty of serving as the Testament Union's surveillance through their generations. Hence, they came to hold a two-fold position: as landlords of the Far East and as knights of their own respective nations. Understanding that the knights do wish to avoid conflict with them, the Union has agreed to back their existence as the 'knight class' as well as their rights. With that, the knights have come into existence as landlords in the Far East. Do you understand?

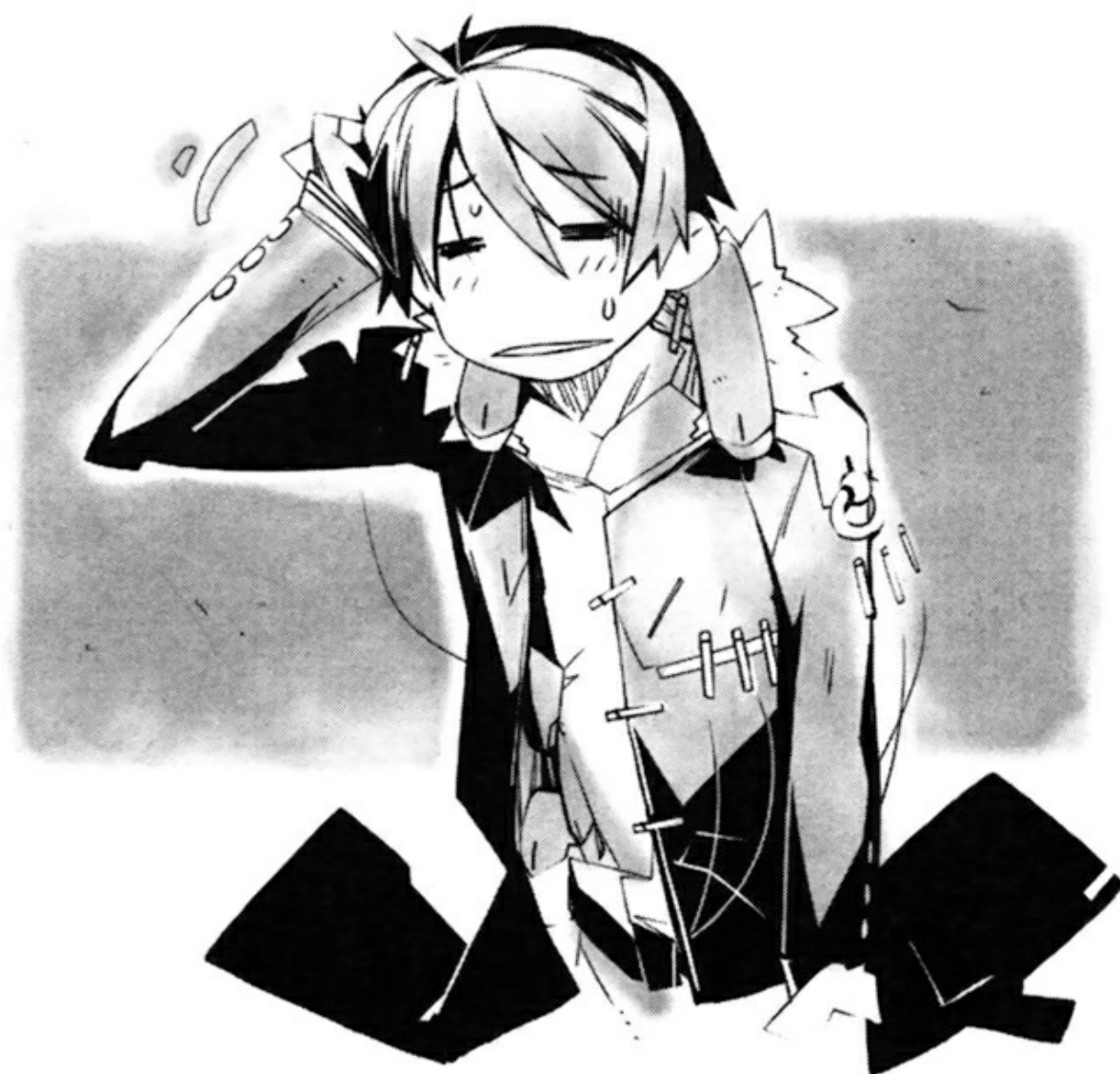
Toori: ...Ah, sorry, Nee-chan, can you turn back for a bit? If you can, umm, ...From the 'Nee-chan! Nee-chan!' part, one more time.

Kimi: Are you thinking of starting this over from the beginning and making all of this in vain?

Chapter 30: Me at the Last Moment

CHAPTER 30

"Me at the Last Moment"



Hmm...

I wonder?

Point Allocation (Things One Understands Not)

Hmm...

I wonder?

Point Allocation (Things One Understands Not)

In preparation for the last duel with Masazumi, the special student general meeting occurring in the Musashi Ariadust Academy entered a period of downtime.

The members of the Provisional Council arrived at the location, went up the stairs and gathered somewhere on the right side of the Academy grounds. They then started preparing for their own meetings using the free time available to them.

By the Academy, the people forming Toori's group were already gathering information from the sign frames they brought out.

In the center was Neshinbara looking at the situation in various places from the broadcasting members' footage.

"Looks like the parliament's side is finally coming out to see us, eh? That's a good sign. At the very least, we'll get more opportunities to do things than if they just decide on everything behind closed doors."

"I was planning to ask Seijun about that, though, you know?"

Toori, in a seated position, brought his chin to rest on his hands and then snapped his right fingers.

"Adele, you're quite fast on your legs, aren't you?"

"Eh?"

In addition to her own raised voice, the others looked to her in surprise.

However, someone answered in her place. It was Tenzou, crossing his arms.

"In last year's sports festival, Adele-dono closed quite the distance as the middle member in the normal-class relay. That contest before the anchor members' turn was quite the spectacle, you know? Though I wouldn't expect everyone to realize it, her being completely spent on the laws of physics

obstacle course relay before that.”

“Ah, well, I don’t really have the stamina, and it doesn’t really help me as a retainer, with my mechanical shell and all.”

“Anyways, I have a place I’d like you to go for me, alright? While you’re there, can you get the dip for the Pro Cricket Dried Boiled Rice Chips? Here’s the money, you keep the change.”

“Well, thirty yen is about the exact price, you know... Ah, thanks for the ten-yen tip, I’ll get a five yen chocolate with that.”

Adele received the memo of his request along with the change. She looked at it, bending her eyebrows.

“? ...Are you sure you’re fine with this?”

“I’m quite interested in it, so it’s fine. I’m sure they’ll figure something out.”

“Huh,” Adele nodded, looking towards the Academy. She was to leave the Academy grounds from the rear exit.

With a gesture, everyone sent her off as she left at a good speed.

Then, drawing a breath, Toori spoke.

“I can’t do anything by myself; but precisely because of that, I have a bit of an idea of who can do what. With that, if she can get along with them...I’m sure we’ll become an unstoppable force.”

“Will it be alright? Masazumi is in a rather complicated position, you know?”

Mitotsudaira took a step forward from the side. Toori merely smiled in response.

He extended his hand, slid his fingers into her hair and ruffled it.

“You came over to our side, didn’t you? Same thing. Say thanks to Bell-san, alright?”

“T-that’s...”

“In the first place, you weren’t exactly playing fair, were you? Abandoning your status as a knight and becoming a commoner, that was your plan, wasn’t it? I can’t really describe it but...you don’t want to become Mikawa’s next ruler,

do you? You don't want to replace Horizon, no?"

"I mean..."

"You said it yesterday as well. How you didn't want to take someone's place to be confessed to."

Receiving everyone's looks with those words, Mitotsudaira's cheeks reddened.

Still, without taking his hand off Mitotsudaira's hair, Toori said:

"Preferring to be a knight rather than a king? You won't get far in this reverse-hierarchy world with that mindset."

"I-it's fine, really. A knight only dedicates herself to her king, after all."

Still being patted on the head, Mitotsudaira raised her eyebrows and clenched her teeth.

"Seriously, even if he's a perverted, carefree, idiotic, weak, poor, inappropriate with his appearance, having a deviant sister and overall the lowest of the low."

Pulling her head away from his hand and thus taking his hand out of her hair, she raised her body.

"Being good at nothing other than being aware of such things, you're really the worst."

However, Mitotsudaira let out a sigh. She then faced Toori, raising her profile.

Right in front of him, with an expression of lowered eyebrows, she said.

"Still, umm, chancellor?"

"Hmm? What is it? Can't stand being on your own? There are all these weird people around you so go to them."

"No, that's not it... Ah, well, I do agree on the weird part, though."

Mitotsudaira shrunk her body slightly with a reddened face.

"I apologize for yesterday."

"Huh? For what?"

“...I said something mean here in this place: ‘It would be nice if you were rejected!’ ”

As everyone turned to her with slight surprise, the silver hair made a gesture.

“If it really had turned out that way, if something even worse happened, I wouldn’t know what to do...”

Looking at Mitotsudaira’s rather lowered head, Toori made a response.

A laugh. His laughter joined with a smile.

“I~diot, that’s not something you should care about, you know? ...I’m a man that will exceed your expectations, after all! That’s why, if you would still concern yourself with me, lend me a hand in saving Horizon. When it’s all done and over with, feel free to boast about yourself, alright? ‘Thanks to me you didn’t get rejected!’ like that!”

“ ... ”

“I beg you. You’re our knight after all. Saving Horizon would be easier with you on our side. We promised we’d be together, right? Miss Knight?”

Hearing those last few words, Mitotsudaira’s raised face relaxed its expression; a smile mixed in with a little bitterness from her lips.

“All you remember are the things of the past, don’t you? Then this is what I shall say.”

Not concerned with their conversation being lost on the others, Mitotsudaira gestured, once again, and opened her mouth.

“To your heart’s content, my king.”

On the grassy plains stood a white tent as well as several tables.

The tent was a wall-less stairwell-type, with the crest of Tres España painted on it in red. Beneath its roof, documents and maps were spread out on two tables; which were also being used to set up a miniature-type “church” for communication purposes.

Finally, the tables outside the tent were used for food preparation.

Everyone had already finished eating, with tableware and cookware put aside and leftovers, both food and drink, stored in containers inside a stove dug out of the soil beside the tent.

However, by the newly-cleaned table were two figures still having their lunch.

Muneshige and Gin. Seated beside each other, they were taking in their own dishes as well as the soy-boiled spinach salad placed between them. However, looking at Gin skillfully using her chopsticks with her giant mechanical fingers, Muneshige said: “Gin-san, why are you eating your paella with chopsticks?”

At that question, Gin turned to look with lowered eyes and a smile at his wrist and the silver spoon held between his fingers.

“...Heh heh, still can’t use chopsticks properly? Master Muneshige is still a child.”

“T-that’s different! That’s not the point!”

“No, it’s not.”

Gin asserted herself holding the two sticks in front of Muneshige.

“...These can be weapons as well. They pierce. Two pieces, with a spare.”

“I feel like we’re drawing further away from the point here, but you think they are superior to western tableware like the fork and knife as well?”

“Against such a small blade of a knife and the curved, highly air-resistant fork? Definitely.”

Still, a small smile appeared on Gin’s lips.

“How the food we have becomes more plentiful after we’ve left Tres España is a mysterious thing.”

Beyond the tent, the hygiene officer in charge of the food lightly held up his hand with a smile.

Both of them responded, but Muneshige said:

“Gin-san, in your opinion Tres España’s cooking is pretty bad, isn’t it?”

“Most of it is okay, but...”

Gin slightly raised her eyebrows.

“The way the garlic is just randomly thrown in and how the rice, cinnamon and milk is just mixed together gave me a weird feeling; and how the fish, meat, beans were just put in with salt as if making *olla podrida* just makes me want to dunk it in miso soup if I had the chance.”

“That was rather conservative of you.”

“Master Muneshige is just not perceptive enough. Even if it’s just the pickled vegetables or wasabi; there is no contest.”

“I have to ask, just what do you require in cooking?”

Muneshige continued.

“I myself would eat whatever you’d make, Gin-san.”

Gin ignored the students around them making breathing noises while fanning themselves with mats and the like. Still, after a moment, she relaxed her shoulders and stated: “Tes, indeed. Even that time when I served you poisoned food, you ate it already being aware of the fact.”

“That one tasted rather sweet, you know?”

“What would you do if you died? Seriously...”

That moment, the male student who was operating the miniature-type “church” on the desk raised his head. Inside the tent, the middle-aged man in student uniform with a robe over it showing his position as the chief of his division started to report something.

A few moments later, he lightly raised one hand towards Muneshige and Gin. In a relaxed tone, he said.

“Vice-chief, Musashi is making quite a bit of noise, but...”

“Tes, from the broadcast we received, Musashi Ariadust Academy’s students are moving towards reclaiming their Student Council rights, through a special student general meeting organized against the vice president, who is on the Provisional Council’s side. ...Over on that side, what is our Chancellery saying?”

“They responded ‘continue to guard K.P.A. Italia’. We were wrong to expect

any reinforcements from them.”

“Tes,” Gin nodded. “The mainland is very likely busy preparing for the fight against England. Last night’s incident revealed the role of the Logismoι Óplo in deciding the fate of the Apocalypse; so the meaning of the battle against England weighs ever heavier on both sides, each being holders of Logismoι Óplo.”

“Still...”

The chief posed a question in a quieter voice.

“What if the people of Musashi were to come for the princess who is being examined for her Logismoι Óplo in our ship?”

While asking that, he looked to the rectangular, black-colored ship in the south.

On the lower frontal region, there was a place enclosed in walls of light; the room they called “Andamio de la Ejecución”.

Its floor was lined with tatami before, but right now the princess was inside having the Logismoι Óplo inside her examined.

The facility was originally used to analyze large supernatural organisms or criminals, being able to investigate their traits and weaknesses, intentions, and if necessary their component elements via disassembly; but in Princess Horizon’s case, the plan was to first examine her for the Logismoι Óplo, which would then be disassembled and extracted from her body.

Light was filling that enclosed space. The analysis should be over in a few minutes. Still...

“Musashi’s special student general meeting will likely end before the princess’s suicide. ...What do you think?”

The one who answered was Muneshige, gathering rice from the paella onto one side of the dish.

“With K.P.A. Italia and Tres España stationed here, I do not believe they will be able to do anything at all. The princess’s ‘suicide’ will surely go well as other nations will not be able to easily interfere considering the location where we

are.

“Therefore, to not let the opportunity slip through, K.P.A. Italia should have also moved to prepare their defenses.

“Though, we would be obliged to cooperate with them in that matter, under the mainland’s orders.”

“...Would we be all right in that case? We did suffer quite a bit of damage from last night...”

“We still have the edge over them in numbers. We have enough to form a Tercio, and the other side has not received military training; we only need to hold out until the time limit to win.

“Moreover, we still have one undamaged Gran Muñeca which can fly as well as several ships we can mobilize. If we have to be cautious about something, it is the Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council...as well as the Far East’s Shinto spells.”

Gin raised her eyebrows in response.

“Shinto spells...?”

“Tes,” Muneshige nodded.

“Gin-san is Catholic...or rather, the people of Tres España are Catholic, aren’t they?

“The Tsirhc religions of Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as the Mlasi do not recognize other religions; so Shinto spells are not recognized anywhere other than Musashi and each nation’s Far Eastern settlements. ...Thus military officers and political families wanting to obtain power to influence the world have gone and naturalized into the various nations. The Tachibana family did so as well, didn’t they?”

Gin nodded, but then tilted her head.

“Still, followers are few in number and the practice of Shinto spells has declined significantly; so what of them?”

“Such a declined practice still holds a certain ability. ...Just like how that man was able to offer money to use spells in the broadcast before, so long as they

can pay the intermediary fee for the use of the shrines' network, Shinto users are able to use spells of gods other than the ones contracted to them.

“In addition, offerings for the intermediary fee are also accepted directly from the contracted god's spells.”

Therefore...

“According to Shinto, offerings of money to financial gods, food for gourmet gods, songs for musical gods...even with the intermediary fee, if each and every one of them were to dedicate their own offerings to their gods, they can borrow the spells of the other gods.

“If I were to explain what this means...any and all practitioners of Shinto, provided they can offer something to their own gods, can utilize all available Shinto spells whenever and however they want.

“In contrast, Tsirhc followers are not able to use spells other than the ones of saints contracted to them. To respect other saints and for discipline in money, transactions in divine power are not possible.”

“I see,” Gin nodded. As if to continue his words, she said:

“Certainly, Shinto practitioners who have excelled in their sanctioned art can become omnipotent through that very art.

“Ironical as it is, this system of transaction Shinto has adopted has only made its practitioners subjects of the nations' provisional rule through the Harmonic Unification War 160 years ago.”

Gin lightly crossed her arms and turned to the mountains where Musashi was located.

“Reduced to Musashi and the settlements, Shinto has failed to strengthen the relations of those two places; its concept of transaction has only been adopted by financial businesses of other nations, as well as its exploitation to develop the necessary spells we know and use as ‘Divine spells’.

“...I hear such uses of Shinto spells have already happened, at the time of P.A. Oda's invasion.”

“...Though the M.H.H.R. and Hashiba, acting as dispatch forces from P.A. Oda,

have yet to hand over that information to the Testament Union. The Thirty Years' War between M.H.H.R. and Hexagone Française has yet to occur after all.

"Therefore, nations have collaborated with Far Easterners from their settlements to study Shinto spells; still, even if the theory is there, the people with the 'art' necessary to put it into practice are few and far between. ...What we just witnessed would surely become valuable data. Perhaps this won't be the last time we'll see it."

Saying that, Muneshige felt his sleeve lightly tugged on by Gin.

He turned to see her tilting her head.

"But why did the Far East not retaliate despite having such power?"

"The peace treaty from the Harmonic Unification War."

Drawing a breath, Muneshige turned to look at the mountain range where Musashi was as well.

"That was how thorough the treaty's disarmament condition was. With the prohibition of possessing weapons of mass destruction, having Shinto spells of the same scale was also forbidden. In any case, Shinto spells can freely recombine provided the offerings are dedicated, meaning they cannot easily be regulated. So, any use of Shinto spells other than in defense would be declared a violation of the treaty. The same applies to the Gods of War; the Testament Union would intervene in any attempt to use them for military purposes. The conflict we saw earlier was a matter of Musashi's internal affairs, so it would not be considered an action of military interest."

"Then..."

Gin looked toward Musashi once again, opening her mouth while doing so.

"The act of obtaining Princess Horizon would be seen as hostility towards the Testament Union. At least, defensive measures would no longer serve as an excuse. In any case, a lord atoning for the mistakes of his country with his life was always the norm where history is concerned. Preventing that from happening would never be justified, especially if it would mean all-out war with the Testament Union."

“I wonder, myself. They would still have other ideas in that area, you know. So let’s take a look. Um, the communications setup... Can it receive the broadcast from Musashi?”

Moments later, a sign frame adorned in crosses appeared in front of Gin and Muneshige.

Displayed were the blue sky and buildings of a town, interspersed with noise. The audio was...

“The broadcast by Musashi’s Broadcasting Committee?”

“Tes, the duel between the vice president and the chancellor in this special student general meeting must be beginning soon.”

“Let’s watch. The students of Far East have not once bet on their fate in over twenty years.

“If last night’s Mikawa battle were to be seen as a conflict between those who are no longer students, what we are about to see now is the return of Musashi into active service after these twenty years. All the other nations will surely have their eyes on this...”

Ha, he drew a breath of laughter, once again taking hold of the spoon and dish that had his paella.

“Depending on the circumstances, any country at all may have their view of Musashi turned 180 degrees around. So let’s finish eating this while we can; the prawn and stuff harden when they’re cold, after all.”

“The footage from Musashi is coming in! It is being transmitted over a normal band, so there is some noise in the signal!”

A girl’s voice filled an elevated terrace.

The terrace was built on the front of a giant white ship’s deck and a white tent was set up on it.

The tent bore the crest of K.P.A. Italia and it functioned as an outdoor command center that performed divine transmissions and other tasks.

However, two people could be seen outside the tent.

One was a demon standing in a black cloak worn over a black uniform.

The other was a man wearing a white cloak as he sat at a table set and sipped at a bottle of water.

“Innocentius, are you not going to watch this? England, Hexagone Française, M.H.R.R., P.A. Oda, and Sviet Rus will most likely be watching.”

“I don’t need to watch it. No matter what the result, it will be a good deal for us, Galileo.” Innocentius held his half-empty bottle of water up toward Galileo. “Musashi’s Special General Student Meeting is supposedly about recovering their authority, but its true goal is deciding whether they will rescue their princess who is being inspected in Tres España’s interrogation ship. If the vice president wins for the Council, Musashi and everything else will be ours. If the Academy wins, they will directly confront us and Musashi and everything else will be ours. The result changes nothing.”

“I was hoping to steer the conversation toward the princess.”

“I see.” Innocentius lowered the bottle to his own eye level. “I don’t like sentimentality. The age of knights is over. In this baroque age, the myths and gods are merely admired as a portion of human culture. Since my defeat at the hands of Tadatsugu, the rise of the people has greatly reduced my power as pope. The people are aware that reducing the Catholic leader’s power will weaken their nation in the long run, but they are forced to do so in accordance with the history recreation.”

“So it is all how history is ‘supposed to be’? Is that also how you view this princess’s ‘suicide’?”

“Her ‘suicide’ will not remain in history.” Innocentius took a sip from the bottle. “Motonobu died during this incident, but the Testament descriptions say Matsudaira Motonobu later changes his name to Ieyasu and rules the Far East. His name must be inherited by someone else to continue the history recreation, but someone needs to make up for the loss of Mikawa and the possession of a Logismoi Óplo. If the princess herself is the Logismoi Óplo, the answer is simple: she can pay for Motonobu’s crimes by presenting us with the Logismoi Óplo that makes up her body. Also, there is no way to separate out the Logismoi Óplo aside from ‘suicide’.”

“And through that, the Mikawa and Logismoí Óplo incidents will have ‘never happened’?”

“Testament.” Innocentius nodded. “It will have never happened. Historically, Mikawa never disappeared, so this is the only way. Without their princess, Musashi can be made into Mikawa and the Far East will never have owned a Logismoí Óplo. But if the princess survives, neither event can be said to have never happened.”

He took a breath.

“Later, the different nations will start the Thirty Years’ War and other skirmishes over the Logismoí Óplo; but the world will ultimately gather together if retrieving the Logismoí Óplo will save us from the Apocalypse. I wonder how much that truth will help reassure the people who are feeling uneasy due to the mysterious phenomena and various rumors. ...And the Far East is the same. Their emperor remains in Kyou, but they are essentially completely under our control. That should lead them to gather along with the rest of the world.”

“Even after their princess’s ‘natural sacrifice’?”

“Do not forget my ‘cool-headed decision’.”

“How harsh. Mankind has passed the Renaissance and reached the Baroque, but we still must kill?”

“Catholics are the representatives of conservatism. That means the Papa-Schola that leads them is the leader of conservatism. Not doing what I must do is unthinkable from a historical perspective.”

Innocentius placed the bottle on the table and turned toward the distant mountainous landscape where Musashi lay.

“If the Logismoí Óplo we receive from this princess is truly part of a plan to save the world from the Apocalypse, I think I will inherit the name of a saint even if that saint should already be dead. That name will befit a savior and it is the most I can do as the leader of the Catholics.”

“I thought you did not like sentimentality.”

“I do not like it, but I do not hate it either. If I hated it, I would never have

become the Papa-Schola. After all, conservatism is sentimentality toward the changing age.”

“Oh, so you are aware that you are behind the times?”

“Don’t get so full of yourself just because you advocate heliocentrism, Galileo. Everyone already knows that’s how it works.”

He laughed quietly, snapped his fingers, and spoke to the student in charge of divine transmissions.

“Now, I’ve changed my mind. Show me the footage from Musashi. I want to see how the Special General Student Meeting is going.”

“Why this all of a sudden? You really have not changed since you were a student.”

“I still am a student, former teacher.” Here alone, he reverted to his old tone of voice. “As the leader of conservatism, I want to see the latest version of modern sentimentality. Was this entire conversation meant to lead me there?”

“No. I was merely trying to convince you because I wanted to watch it.”

“Testament. I am glad to see you are acting like a student too. Now, show us the footage.” Innocentius grabbed the bottle from the table. “Depending on how it plays out, I may intervene.”

Three people stood on the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

They all faced the staircase and the one on the port side was Toori.

To his right, on the starboard side, was Masazumi. Behind them was Oriotorai.

Oriotorai moved in front of her two students.

“President Sakai isn’t here, but let’s begin the final duel of the Special General Student Meeting. This will be the last one, so how about I join in? So, um... Will it be a thirty minute round of combat?”

“That’s amazing, sensei! That joke wasn’t cute at all!”

As Oriotorai smiled and swung up a clenched fist, Toori fled a half step

backwards. On the other hand, Masazumi sighed and waved her hands back and forth.

“It will be a debate, so please just continue playing the role of witness. It can be hard to determine the winner.”

“To be honest, I don’t really understand how it works,” said Oriotorai. “I can bind a contract between you that sets the rules of the debate, but please don’t ask for anything more.”

“Judge. That is plenty. We will ask each other questions and provide the answers. If you can make your opponent admit their disadvantage or your advantage, you win. Aoi, you understand our positions, correct? You can actually discuss this, right?”

“O-o-of-of-of course! D-d-don’t underestimate me!”

“Try not cowering and trembling when you say that.”

But Toori scratched at his head, faced Masazumi, and gave his usual smile.

“I’m not very smart, so I can get help, right?”

“Yes. If specialized answers come from someone qualified in that field, it should help convince the students.”

Masazumi looked past Toori and to the port side of the schoolyard. She looked across the Student Council, the Chancellor’s Officers, and her other classmates before turning to the starboard side.

Adults were gathered there. They were the thirty members of the Provisional Council. Her own father and his clients were there.

Masazumi turned away from them.

“If necessary, I will get help as well. Is that fine?”

“Perfectly fine!”

She tilted her head with half-lidded eyes, but Oriotorai cleared her throat and spoke up.

“Are the two of you ready for the debate? Who will go first and who will go second?”

Her question received an immediate response from Toori. He threw both his arms into the air.

“I’ll go first!”

Toori’s desire to go first caused Masazumi and everyone else to freeze in place. They all produced the same response.

“Eh?”

“Why are you all so surprised!? This is a pain, so I want to get it over with as quickly as possible.”

As soon as he said that, Shirojiro spoke from the starboard side.

“You fool! Going second is easier! When a merchant is ripping someone off, he never suggests the first price, does he!? This is no different!”

“Hm. Shiro-kun, I think that’s too much to reveal in public.”

Hearing that, Oriotorai turned to Toori and stared up at him.

“What will you do? Will you apologize and admit you were stupid? C’mon, just say it. Say you were stupid.”

“Y-you’re trying to pick a fight with me, aren’t you!? Aren’t you!?”

“No, I don’t have enough free time to fight weaklings. I’m just making fun of you.”

“Y-you’re a horrible teacher! I’m gonna make you apologize one of these days! And I won’t forgive you until then! I’m serious!”

“Ah ha ha. Sorry, sorry. Did I hurt your feelings?”

“No. And you apologized, so I’ll forgive you. I’ll forgive you!!”

“Was that really enough for you?” muttered everyone else.

“What will you do?” asked Masazumi while narrowing her eyes. “I’m willing to go first.”

“No, I said I’d go first.”

“Are you sure?” Oriotorai snapped her fingers and a torii-style sign frame

appeared next to her face. “Are you really fine with that? Okay. Here’s a contract of Misato, one of the Ookuninushi type gods related to contracts. If either of you fails to argue from your respective positions, you’ll be punished. You understand that, right?”

“Judge,” said both Toori and Masazumi.

They both placed a hand on the sign frame.

Oriotorai watched as Masazumi placed her hand first and then Toori affixed his seal with a practiced roll of the fingers.

“Toori, you’ve done this a lot, haven’t you?”

“C’mon, enough with the compliments, sensei. The guy at the police box doesn’t know me by name for nothing, you know?”

“That isn’t a compliment. Anyway, sensei, what is the punishment?”

Oriotorai nodded at Masazumi’s question.

“Well, divine punishment would be a bit too scary, right? So instead, I’ll hit you with my weapon.”

With a smile, Toori slowly turned to look Masazumi in the eye.

“You’ll die.”

“D-don’t just come out and say it, you idiot. Make it into a joke instead.”

“Don’t worry. Cutting you with my sword would kill you instantly, so I’ll be hitting you with the scabbard. Don’t overlook my consideration.”

The two students looked at the long sword on Oriotorai’s back. It was at least 1.7 meters long and the scabbard was clearly made of metal.

“Wouldn’t an instant death hurt a lot less?”

“I’ve never died, so I can’t say. I’d rather not find out, though.”

The two exchanged a nod.

Toori then took a step toward the bow and toward the people gathered below the stairs.

“Okay, let’s get started.”

“Make sure to debate properly, okay? I want to avoid hitting someone if it won’t accomplish anything.”

“I will, I will.” Toori took in a breath. “Okay, everyone. I, former Chancellor and President Aoi Toori, have a suggestion for how to handle this incident.”

The wind blew through. That wind with a faint hint of marine saltiness indicated the midpoint of the afternoon.

He spread his arms as the wind blew across him.

“It comes down to a single issue. Retrieving my authority and everything else is nothing more than a foothold toward a grander plan to rescue Horizon and confess to her. So let’s make this clear. What do we have to gain and what do we have to lose by rescuing Horizon? That is what I will be debating with...um... Seijun.”

And so...

“First, I’ll make my position clear. My suggestion is as follows.”

Everyone watched and listened.

As Toori stood atop the stairs in the wind, he scratched his head yet spoke clearly.

“How about we give up on trying to rescue Horizon?”

In front of Tres España’s tent, the divine transmission officer, the medical officer doing the cooking, the commander, Tachibana Muneshige, and the others were left dumbfounded at Toori’s statement.

Gin alone looked around the unmoving group and spotted a grain of rice on Muneshige’s mouth.

“Your lunch.”

She skillfully plucked it off with her artificial arm’s fingers and put it in her own mouth.

In K.P.A. Italia's tent, the student in charge of divine transmissions remained motionless. Galileo and Innocentius were equally motionless.

Innocentius had been drinking from his bottle and the water spilled from the corner of his mouth.

"..."

But he remained motionless.

On the Musashi, everyone remained speechless and motionless.

The townspeople, Guard Unit, Provisional Council, teachers, and everyone else stood perfectly still and did not utter a word.

"..."

But there were some who managed to move: Tenzou and Urquiaga on the port side of the schoolyard and Naomasa who had just returned.

The three of them climbed up onto the bridge and took up positions to the port, starboard, and center. They lowered their hands once to measure the tempo and raised them on a count of three.

And on their cue...

"Ehhhhhh!?" shouted the entirety of Musashi.

During the shout, Suzu's knees gave out limply beneath her.

"W-wah!" shouted Asama who stood behind her. "S-Suzu-san! Suzu-san! I know this was unexpected, but pull yourself together!"

"I-I'm f-fine. S-some kind of c-cushion caught me..."

"Heh heh heh. Heretical shrine maiden, why are you burying Suzu in your giant breasts?"

"Do you really have to continue humiliating me with body-related jokes!? Goddamn Shinto!"

Asama went on to shout out what everyone else was thinking.

"What is going on!?"

Toori waited for everyone to stop their confused shout because they needed to catch their breath. He used the relative silence to speak while still scratching at his head.

“C’mon, everyone. Just think about it for a second. If we go rescue Horizon, it’ll cause a huge war with the Testament Union. I don’t know about you, but starting Armageddon sounds like a bad idea to me.”

“Wait just a minute!!” shouted Masazumi who stood diagonally behind him.

She glanced to the starboard side of the schoolyard and saw the entire Provisional Council frantically nod toward her.

“Y-y-you... Aoi, wh-wh-what are you saying!?”

“What are *you* saying, Seijun?”

She looked up into the sky, took a deep breath, and forcefully lowered her head once more.

“That’s my line!! What do you mean we shouldn’t rescue Horizon!?”

“Oh, so you’re arguing we should go rescue her!?”

“N-no, I’m not! Why did you steal my line!?” She brought a hand to her chest. “The suggestion you just gave is my suggestion!!”

“No, it’s not.” Toori pointed at Oriotorai behind her. “She said we would debate and that we’d argue from our ‘respective positions’, but she never said which was which. I’m just saying what my position is. What about you?”

“I-I...”

As Masazumi grew flustered, the surrounding silence took on a different form.

Rather than a shocked silence, everyone was silently and slowly observing the two representatives.

And amid that heavy silence, Toori spoke.

“I go first and then you go, but we never decided who would be on which side. I chose to go first because the rules said I could choose which side I got.

And if you break the rules, you'll get punished. Look."

Masazumi glanced behind her.

Oriotorai was making practice swings of her sword and scabbard. She was holding it above her head and swinging it down until it almost touched the floor. The movement between the two positions was too fast for her eyes to see.

"Hmm. I'll actually be hitting someone, so there'll be some resistance. I may need to use more strength to make it to the floor."

"Um, sensei? You don't have to take this so seriously..."

"Eh?"

As Oriotorai turned toward her, Masazumi asked a testing question.

"Uh, about Aoi's decision just now..."

"Yeah, it really surprised me, so I was making some practice swings to distract myself." She brought up the contract sign frame once more. "But if you want to cancel this and rewrite it, you have to pay a cancellation fee."

"And the cancellation fee is...?"

"Five strikes."

Masazumi hung her head and Toori gave a solemn nod behind her.

"With that sword pressure, you'd vanish from the face of the earth on the second one."

"Y-you don't have to state the obvious."

"C'mon, you two. I'm not that much of a gorilla. You wouldn't vanish until the fourth strike."

"How is that any different!?" shouted everyone.

Masazumi sighed, but Toori circled to the starboard side and spread his arms. The Provisional Council was now behind him as if supporting him. And with his back to them, he spoke.

"Okay, let's do this, Seijun. You'll have to tell me. If we rescue Horizon, it

could turn into an all-out war with the Testament Union. If it does, is there still anything we gain by rescuing Horizon?”

His voice filled the air.

“I can’t do anything and I can’t answer that question myself, so tell me, Seijun. What exactly is it that I want?”

Chapter 31: As I Stand at the Last Moment

CHAPTER 31

"As I Stand at the Last Moment"



What has been decided
Without being decided?
What is understood
Without being understood?
Point Allocation (Gaze)

What has been decided

Without being decided?

What is understood

Without being understood?

Point Allocation (Gaze)

Several people were gathered at a table near the Tres Españan tent set up on a grassy field.

They were not all sitting around the table. With Muneshige and Gin in the center, about a dozen people were gathered as if taking a group photo. They held a bag of popcorn made with corn from the New World as they watched the *cadena firma* open in front of Muneshige and Gin.

The audio and video footage displayed the situation of the Special General Student Meeting as transmitted by the Ariadust Academy Broadcast Committee.

Currently, a Broadcast Committee reporter wearing a golden kamishimo over his uniform spoke in the center of the screen.

“Now, the final battle of the Special General Student Meeting has begun! This battle is between the Student Council president and vice president; but what do you think as a classmate, stealth commentator Tenzou-san?”

“Hmm. Good question. Toori-dono appears to have the advantage due to that unexpected beginning, but it is difficult to know what he’s thinking.”

“I see. He really is a human bomb that could go off at any time. Based on the uniform color, I suppose he would be a black powder bomb. At any rate, I hope the two of them will make this an excellent general student meeting.”

“Master Muneshige, don’t you find this type of agitating commentary to be rather annoying?” asked Gin.

“I just hope all their agitation doesn’t lead to a knockout from a low blow.”

Everyone glared at the couple as if to say “that’s not the issue”, but neither

one showed any sign of caring.

Meanwhile, they saw movement on the bridge visible on the screen. After receiving advice from their respective groups, the two competitors climbed back up the stairs. One was oddly cheerful and the other appeared exhausted.

“Now, the battle of destiny is about to begin for both sides!”

Just as everyone eagerly clenched their fists and leaned in close, the student in charge of divine transmissions carried over a message.

The group looked curiously at the message, but their expressions soon changed.

“...?”

And then they changed again.

“...!?”

They quickly turned back toward the screen and saw the debate was just about to begin.

“K.P.A. Italia is definitely going to intervene now,” groaned Muneshige. “They’ll have no other choice once they learn what Princess Horizon’s Logismoι Óplo does.”

Masazumi thought atop the bridge.

The debate was beginning.

...But why am I on this side?

She had never expected to oppose her father and the others like this.

She wanted to find a way out of it, but the simple route was off limits. If she made a mistake, she would end up on the receiving end of the practice swings Oriotorai was making. She could not let that happen. She had a feeling that had to be avoided at all costs.

For an instant, she contemplated declaring her loss and accepting Aoi’s victory; but that would not be a debate. And if she broke the rules of the debate, the practice swings would become reality.

And so she had to think.

She honestly felt the Provisional Council was on the side of the proper future.

After all, the gathered secretaries had told her what the Council had said the night before.

...In an all-out war against the Testament Union, there's nothing we can do.

The Testament Union covered almost the entire world. P.A. Oda had partially left, but they had constructed a contact point for resolving wars. Also, the other eastern and northern non-Tsirhc and non-Mlasi nations received support from the Testament Union in order to survive in that harsh land. That support required some acceptance of their culture.

What would happen in all-out war?

Aoi cheerfully answered that question as he stood before her. He turned toward the others as he did.

“Y’see, if everything goes well and we rescue Horizon, the Italians who lead the Testament Union will feel disgraced. I think they’d be pissed enough to start a war. And that would be bad. After all, the Testament Union is kind of like the entire world. We would be at war until we defeated the entire world.”

...That's exactly what I heard from the secretaries last night.

Someone must have given Aoi a hint just now.

He then blatantly unfolded a cheat sheet and spoke as if reading a proclamation.

“War is a big deal. What will you do about that, Seijun?”

He suddenly turned the debate over to her.

She had known this would happen. He had given a reason why rescuing Horizon would be a bad idea, so she had to give reasons why it would be advantageous and methods of avoiding the negative side.

But she had nothing prepared. She had assumed she would stand on the Council’s side, so she had only thought about how to persuade the Academy.

And so she spoke while feeling warm sweat cover her body.

“Well...uh...”

“Seijun-kun, speak up or I can’t hear you.”

...I am going to kill this moron!

To keep her anger from exploding out, she turned toward the port side where her classmates were whispering to her in the schoolyard.

“Don’t worry about it! He’s just an idiot! He really is!”

As she wondered what it was about him that was so unifying, Masazumi thought for a while and then spoke.

“Th-then I will give you the advantages to rescuing Horizon.”

She took a breath and said what she had thought up just now.

“The greatest advantage is securing Musashi’s sovereignty.”

Sovereignty.

Aoi tilted his head when he heard the word.

“Eh? Sovereignty? What’s that?”

Everyone else was tilting their head just like him, so Masazumi answered.

“Sovereignty is a way of perceiving the essence of a nation. It comes from the history recreation of Hexagone Française. ...All of us belong to a nation such as the Far East, K.P.A. Italia, Tres España, or P.A. Oda, right? But what exactly is it we refer to as a nation?”

“Well, it has land and people...”

“You are referring to the territory and citizens that a nation must have, correct?”

But...

“With only those two things, you simply have people gathered in a certain land. They have no justification in opposing a foreign invasion.”

“No justification?” Aoi frowned. “Sure they do. If they’re invaded, people will die. The other side’s evil.”

“The other side has a justification as well. The invasion will allow their nation to prosper.”

“Eh? But that ain’t right.”

Aoi folded his arms and asked the crowd “don’t you agree?” before turning back to Masazumi.

“Why don’t they think about the ones being invaded? It’s almost like...”

“Almost like?”

“Like the ones being invaded are animals being hunted.”

“That’s right,” said Masazumi. She spread her arms toward the crowd. “No thought is given to the ones being invaded because they lack the ‘sovereignty’ that puts them on an equal level to the invading nation. In other words, a nation without sovereignty is not viewed as a ‘nation’ by the other nations and the people there are not viewed as ‘people’. The land is nothing but a gathering spot for beasts.”

She took a breath and recalled what she had seen in the books she read.

“Three abilities are needed for a nation to claim its sovereignty:

“1. The ability to demonstrate independence and thus be equal to other nations.

“2. The ability to rule the nation’s territory and citizens and thus maintain the nation.

“3. The ability to make decisions and thus support the previous two.

“These three are known as external sovereignty, internal sovereignty, and absolute decision-making power. With these three abilities, a nation is equal to other nations, rules itself, and has the power necessary. In other words, it is accepted as an independent nation and any threats will be in between nations and thus illegal.”

Masazumi took a breath.

“Currently, the Far East has had most of its territory and people taken and the three abilities needed for sovereignty are being restricted.”

“Really?”

...Yes, you idiot!

After her silent shout, Masazumi sighed inwardly.

“Our chancellor and Student Council president should have absolute decision-making power, but the Testament Union is interfering with his decisions.”

“Oh, they supported me, so I didn’t realize. Was that interference?”

“It may be indirect, but it is still interference. And there is a lot more, too.”
She lowered her shoulders. “Take external sovereignty for example. If we can’t resist their interference, we aren’t exactly equal to the other nations, are we?”

“That’s true.”

...See?

“As for internal sovereignty, most of the Far East is under provisional rule, the reservations are influenced by the nation that rules the territory, and Musashi is on the verge of having its authority stripped at the hands of another nation. That means we fail to rule our territory and citizens as the foundation of internal sovereignty.”

“That’s true.”

...Does he really understand?

Despite her doubts, she could only continue on. And so she slowly pointed to the south. She pointed strongly toward empty air in order to bring to mind the land port and Horizon who was there.

“Horizon is the legitimate heir to Mikawa and the Matsudaira clan which will eventually rule the Far East. And currently, the Testament Union has forbidden Mikawa’s ruler from boarding the Musashi. That is part of their influence over us.”

But...

“But if we rescue Horizon, Musashi will gain a ruler of the Far East with no Testament Union influence.”

“That can’t happen,” immediately declared Aoi. He then nodded. “That’s

being too naïve.”

“Naïve? How is it naïve?”

Masazumi gathered strength in her gaze as she stared at him.

He unfolded another cheat sheet and then frowned.

“Listen. U-um, if Horizon does not enter the student’s body... What kind of erotic stuff is this!? Koni-tan, I wanted something serious!”

“That clearly says ‘student body’. How did you imagine up the ‘apostrophes’?”

“No peeking!! A-and what’s wrong with the student’s body!? I want to enter the student’s body too! ...Wait! But nothing said it was a female body!”

“...You never cease to amaze me.”

“C’mon, enough compliments. I don’t want you falling for me that easily.”

Denying it would only confuse matters further, so Masazumi remained silent.

As everyone watched him, the idiot struck a pose.

“Listen. If Horizon does not enter the student body, she can’t use her decision-making power. In this student-driven world, all decision-making authority lies with the academies. Plus, Mikawa’s ruler isn’t allowed on the Musashi, right?”

“With Mikawa destroyed, we can say the ruler has evacuated to the Musashi. And Horizon may not be part of the student body now, but she can always join the Academy.”

“Can she really pass the entrance exam?”

Aoi’s comment produced booing from the girls on the port side.

“That was very rude!!” shouted Asama as their representative. “Don’t you agree, everyone!?”

“What!? You’re one to talk, Asama! You’re way ruder every time you show those gigantic boobs of yours to someone as pure as me! No matter how much I try to look away, they always find their way into my field of vision. It’s silent sexual violence. I’ve had no choice but to lighten your crimes by staring enough

for everyone!”

“Let’s see. Where did I put my bow?”

“Don’t jump up the stairs like that!!”

“Aoi, you really like causing infighting, don’t you?”

While realizing she was glaring at him with half-lidded eyes, Masazumi moved the conversation on.

“She does not need to take the entrance exam.”

“Wait just a second.” Aoi waved his hands back and forth. “No more backdoor admissions. We already have imperial boy.”

In a small room, Azuma and Miriam each held one of a small girl’s hands. They were positioned on either side of the girl while lying in a bed. Miriam was watching the sign frame Azuma had opened in the bed space.

“Azuma, don’t tell me...”

“I-I didn’t! That was just one of Aoi-kun’s unfunny jokes!”

“Aoi has made an unexpected attack,” said the commentator. “Without Azuma-sama present, Masazumi might be in trouble.”

“Well, if you say so, I will believe you,” said Miriam.

“Backdoor?” said a new voice.

The small girl had opened her eyes.

Azuma and Miriam exchanged a glance before looking at the girl’s unfocused eyes.

“Do you know who I am?”

The girl looked toward Miriam but tilted her head.

“Who...?”

Miriam smiled bitterly and Azuma spoke to the girl.

“Where is mama? Do you know?”

The girl looked up into the air and thought for a few seconds. She finally shook her head with faintly glowing tears in her eyes.

“Mama...”

“Azuma, why are you making her cry? Honestly.”

Miriam placed a hand on the girl’s shoulder and gently drew her close.

It was an awkward movement, but the girl let Miriam embrace her while still holding Azuma’s hand.

Miriam nodded toward the girl’s suppressed crying and uncomfortable movements.

“It’s okay. It’s okay.”

As the girl clung to her as if trying to sink into her, Miriam nodded again.

“I’m mama. I’ll be your mama.”

She embraced the girl’s back and raised her head a bit. She looked at Azuma with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“C’mon, papa. What’s the matter?”

“Eh? I...I...”

“Azuma.”

With her eyes narrowed in a slight smile, she spoke with the same tone as Azuma had when he urged Miriam earlier.

“It’s your turn, Azuma.”

He groaned slightly, but finally gave in and adjusted his grip on the girl’s hand.

“I’m papa.”

The girl nodded in Miriam’s arms.

Miriam then mouthed a question to Azuma while indicating the sign frame with her gaze.

“Did you take the entrance exam?”

“I did. There was another way in, though.”

“You mean a backdoor?”

“No.” He frantically shook his head. “There is another legitimate way into the Academy without taking the entrance exam.”

“That’s right. You can join the Academy without taking a standard entrance exam.”

As Masazumi spoke below the afternoon sky, Aoi tilted his head.

“Seriously? What way is there other than the written exam?”

She immediately answered him.

“The special talent exam.”

Masazumi mentally nodded at the silence that followed her statement.

...There are few examples on the Musashi.

But that was a way in for people who excelled at combat, spells, or the arts. That exam method had even been used by some of her classmates.

“Ha ha ha. Nenji-kun, that was how we got in, wasn’t it!”

“Yes. Because our very existences are valuable!”

“By the way, I did not use that method,” commented Hassan despite no one asking. “I am perfectly normal. In other words, I am medium-spicy.”

At any rate, Horizon could join the Academy using the special talent exam.

However...

“Wait, wait. What is Horizon’s special talent? Working at a bakery?”

“Isn’t it obvious? The Logismoi Óplo.”

Masazumi realized how outrageous her statement was.

“There are only nine in existence and she owns one and is one, so that more than qualifies as a valuable talent. Am I wrong?”

In front of the Tres Españan tent, Gin grabbed popcorn with chopsticks.

“That is ridiculous.”

“But it is a valid line of thinking, Gin. The Logismoι Óplo are indeed valuable.”

“Testament. In other words, you wish to transfer to Musashi. Is that what you are saying, Master Muneshige?”

“U-um, no...”

Everyone glared at Muneshige while he struggled to find something to say.

Amid them all, Gin shoved some popcorn toward Muneshige’s mouth using her chopsticks.

As everyone’s eyes narrowed further, he drew back a bit, but the chopsticks pursued him.

“Gin, wh-what are you doing?”

“You must not flee before the enemy.”

The *cadena firma* then displayed Musashi Ariadust’s vice president.

“If she became a student, Matsudaira’s ruler would hold a higher position than the King of Musashi sent by the Testament Union. Not only would she be a student, but Musashi is only a portion of Matsudaira territory.”

As everyone shifted their focus to the vice president, Muneshige ate the popcorn off of the chopsticks.

“Ah.”

Gin’s eyebrows rose after missing the crucial instant.

“H-how about we focus on listening for now?” he said. “After all, these people might become our enemies.”

“To sum up,” said Masazumi. To make sure everyone could see, she spread her arms in a pose of acceptance. “If Horizon is returned to Musashi, the Far East will gain a ruler free of influence from other nations. That will secure our sovereignty and finally make us equal to the other nations.”

“But...” Aoi tilted his head. “Won’t the Testament Union want to stop that at

all costs?”

“Yes. They will try to stop it. Gaining sovereignty will make the Far East a lot harder for them to rule. That is why saying we will not rescue Horizon is the same as saying that we do not want sovereignty and that we are accepting their rule.”

From the Testament Union’s perspective, Far Eastern sovereignty was only a bad thing.

“If the Far East does proclaim its sovereignty, the Testament Union nations will be unable to continue their provisional rule over it and the other nations will be forced to leave the islands of the Far East. However, the world beyond the ocean has a harsh and wild environment. They will want to avoid being driven out there. That is why they will refuse to recognize our sovereignty. They will use the Harmonic Unification War’s peace treaty to insist we do not have that right. They will say our sovereignty is in violation of the treaty.”

In other words...

“Even if we rescue Horizon and proclaim our sovereignty, it will produce a struggle for existence between the Testament Union and us. We will insist we have been freed from provisional rule while they will accuse us of violating the treaty.” Masazumi shrugged. “And thus rescuing Horizon and gaining sovereignty is a double-edged sword.”

“I see.”

Masazumi saw Aoi nod yet again.

As he continued to nod, he suddenly raised his right index finger.

“So if we rescue Horizon, war is inevitable?”

He pulled a new cheat sheet out of his pocket and held it up for everyone to see.

“Then I have a question from Konishi-kun the merchant!” He went on to read the question. “Even if we rescue the princess and achieve Far Eastern sovereignty, a war could cause deaths. What are your thoughts on this? ...Okay,

do you have an answer, Seijun-kun!?”

“When did you become the MC?” she asked as she thought.

...Deaths, hm?

They would be an inevitable product of war. While thinking it was odd to refer to deaths as a “product”, she realized something. There was something odd about the question.

Namely, the person who had given it.

...The Konishi family is a Far Eastern merchant family that converted to Catholicism.

Merchants thought in terms of money, so why was he asking about the deaths a war would produce?

...It is a calculation and comparison of “numbers”.

Masazumi now understood the intention behind this question.

“Aoi, war will produce deaths. That is a given. However, did you give any thought to the *deaths produced by avoiding war?*”

“What? Avoiding war produces deaths too?”

Masazumi nodded in response.

“Yes. Avoiding war will also produce deaths.”

...I’m really beginning to oppose my father and the Council now.

But she could not stop speaking. This opinion was a necessary part of her side.

“Listen. The budgets of the different reservations act as the Far East’s finances and they have all been frozen. The Testament Union will eventually take it all away and it is currently April. Do you understand what that means? The fiscal year has only just begun for the Far East, so the reservations’ budgets were almost entirely untouched. But now the Testament Union has seized most of it. Do you understand what that means?” asked Masazumi again. “The reservations are in their least funded state. And all public funding for public projects, hospitals, crime prevention, water, sewage, *etc.* has been stopped.

The hospitals are the biggest problem. If they are not functioning, people cannot be treated and medicine will be unavailable.”

Also...

“The less money in the reservations as a whole, the less money the people will have, which will bring poverty. To increase the amount of money, they will have to gather foreign currency; but they cannot produce very much without money.”

“Meaning...?”

“The poverty will only worsen with time and the people will approach death as they are unable to maintain a normal lifestyle. Those are the deaths that will be produced by avoiding war here.”

“Th-then...” began Aoi in opposition. “The people can leave the reservations and join the nations controlling them.”

“That is exactly what the Testament Union wants.” Masazumi nodded. “They will almost certainly provide assistance for anyone joining. They will assist in the religious conversion and the language barrier. Doing so will be a huge boon for the Testament Union.”

“A boon? Wouldn’t a bunch of new people be a bad thing?”

“Not necessarily. They would have laborers to work almost as cheaply as slaves and they could forcibly solve the problems caused by the segregation in the harmonic territories. And most importantly, the Far East has technology.”

She spread her arms wide toward the sky as she spoke.

“Have you forgotten about the giant aerial ship known as the Musashi? In order to reproduce the Ame no Torifune of Far Eastern mythology mentioned in the Testament descriptions, the Far East is much more advanced than the other nations in aerial ship technology and related fields.”

She paused for a second.

“That aerial ship technology is what the other nations want the most.”

The people of Musashi listened to Masazumi across the ship.

“Once the provisional rule was put in place after the Harmonic Unification War, the Far East created the Musashi as its own territory. The other nations were allowed to take part and sharing our aerial ship technology was used to aid our war negotiations. The Musashi became a trade ship that traveled on the borderlines between nations and our development grew even more focused on the aerial field due to being freed from researching and developing weaponry. IZUMO is the Far East’s great corporate union and the leading force behind constructing the Musashi. As its name suggests, it was always focused on the fields related to the sky.”

Everyone listened.

“But the technology used in the Great Remodeling of the Musashi ten years ago was not shared with the Testament Union because Mikawa had allied with P.A. Oda. We did not share our powerful stealth system or our emergency gravitational cruising system, so the other nations want them. For example, the K of K.P.A. Italia stands for Kure. In the Far East’s aerial ship industry, Kure is second only to IZUMO. K.P.A. Italia is on the inland sea, so they expected to decline during the Age of Exploration and secured income by controlling Kure and building ships for other nations. They would want nothing more than the Musashi’s current technology. Also...”

By Tres España’s tent, Muneshige, Gin, and the others held their breath as they listened to Masazumi.

“In accordance with the history recreation, Tres España will soon enter a war against England. During that war, Tres España will send out their Grande y Felicísima Armada made up of 130 warships.”

But...

“But the history recreation means that armada will lose and ironically be referred to as the ‘Invincible Armada’. To carry this out, England has been receiving technological assistance from IZUMO.”

Gin nodded and spoke.

“The Far East island of Tsushima was too small for England, so they built their nation on the floating island they brought from the Harmonic Divine States. As such, England acted as an intermediary between the Far East and the other nations during the Harmonic Unification War. They were heavily involved in the construction of the Musashi and still maintain strong connections to IZUMO.”

“But,” said Musashi’s vice president over the divine transmission. “I doubt Tres España is simply planning to lose to England and its Far Eastern technology. By winning the battle, producing a truly ‘Invincible Armada’, and yet surrendering, they can achieve a political victory while preserving the history recreation. And if they had the technology needed to expand and strengthen their Invincible Armada, they would gain more power later.”

Sakai, “Musashi”, and “Shinagawa” walked toward the Musashi using the gangway connecting the Musashi to a barge from the specialized land port.

As the wind from the bottom of the valley rustled their clothing, they heard Masazumi’s voice coming from the Musashi.

“Furthermore, aerial ships can transport land goods and personnel. With the Thirty Years’ War approaching, M.H.R.R. and Hexagone Française will want this technology, but so would Qing and Russia. Ships that can pass over tall mountains are rare, but the Musashi can accomplish that in its current form.”

“Musashi” raised her head to look up at the giant ship that could be referred to as her true body.

“Masazumi-sama knows a surprising amount about us. The conditions for gravitational cruising are quite strict, so it is almost never used.”

“It looks like she has a fairly nerdy side to her.”

As Sakai smiled, the wind and the girl’s voice arrived.

“If the people of the Far East join the Testament Union nations, they will obtain the methods, technology, ports, and fuel they need to build and use ships like the Musashi. Rather than spending long years researching and developing the technology for themselves, they can obtain all the knowledge and technology in a much shorter time for much less money.”

“Then,” said Aoi. “Why not let that happen? We can make a triumphant return with our technology. If you add in the people’s revolution that Nate mentioned before, we’d be in pretty good standing, right? It sounds great, doesn’t it?”

“For the technical workers and aerial ship workers, yes. But who can say about the others. If they try to go with the truth of the revolution, it’s possible they could be trapped inside the poor reservations.” Masazumi formed a fake smile. “Listen. The reservations will grow very poor before any of this would happen. There would likely be opposition from the people who do not want to join the other nations or convert to those nations’ religions. Even if it does not develop into war, there will be deaths. And these deaths will come from the normal citizens of all the reservations rather than students.”

She spread her arms and asked him if he understood a few times.

“You might be trying to avoid war by not rescuing Horizon, but the reservations will end up paying the price. Those are the *deaths produced by avoiding war*. Are you saying deaths caused by deficient social services and poverty are okay as long there are no direct deaths from war? That is nothing more than avoiding the deaths before your eyes and writing off the unseen deaths as ‘unavoidable’!”

Just as she began to advance further with her argument, Aoi cut in.

“Wait just a second.”

He held out his opened right hand to stop her, pulled a few cheat sheets from his pocket, and held up one of them.

“Um, let’s see... You’re saying my choice will produce deaths even if we don’t go to war, right?”

“Judge. Exactly. When faced with war, insisting that avoiding war will lead to peace is no more than turning a blind eye to the future.”

“I see.” He nodded directly at her, but immediately continued speaking. “Then I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“If we do not rescue Horizon, the Testament Union’s rule will further advance and people will die. But rescuing her will cause war. We have two options: accept that quiet rule or oppose it and fight for freedom. In that case...”

He suddenly pulled a new cheat sheet from his pocket.

Immediately afterwards, Masazumi heard him read a name.

“This question is from Masanobu-kun the politician!”

“...!?”

Her heart skipped a beat when she heard her father’s name.

And then she heard her father’s question.

“If we do rescue Princess Horizon, we will need a just cause to present to the Testament Union. Without one, they can rightfully claim we are violating our treaty. What is our justified reason for rescuing the princess? What puts the Testament Union in the wrong for forcing her suicide?”

“An excellent question and an excellent demand,” muttered Innocentius on the deck of the K.P.A. Italia ship Regno Unito. “The biggest problem for us would not be the Far East insisting on a justice that only they agree to. It would be a reason that makes the rest of the world view us as evil for ruling them.”

After all...

“Rulers fear being seen as evil more than anything else. If that happens, other countries will ally themselves with the Far East to prove they are not evil and protect their own image.”

With a smile on the corner of his mouth, Innocentius turned toward Galileo.

“Thirty years ago, the Far East did exactly that to me and I lost.” He sat up and faced the *cornice firma* in front of him. “Now, what will they do? Can they find the words that will actually damage us rather than giving a convenient excuse for themselves?” He took a breath. “If they can, the Far East will truly have been my enemy for twenty years straight.”

Masazumi understood.

...A justification, hm?

Everything she had said so far was from the Far East's point of view.

Those ideas might benefit the Far East, but they were nothing but evil from the Testament Union's perspective.

For the Testament Union to accept the Far East's opinion, they needed to be "correcting the Testament Union's mistake".

If they could convince the Testament Union that they were wrong, an all-out war could be avoided.

At the very least, the nations that agreed would not oppose the Far East.

...But...

She thought.

...Is there a justification like that?

As if to follow through on that question, she heard a voice.

Aoi began to read something written on his cheat sheet.

The words were spoken in Aoi's voice, but they were clearly her father's words.

"Once war begins, it will continue until both sides make peace. Alternatively, it could continue until one side has been annihilated. If war does begin, the reservations will certainly be taken hostage."

He continued.

"The princess's 'suicide' is only natural for a ruler of this era. If we prohibit it, we will be criticized by the other nations. We will lose all allies and continue fighting until our destruction."

So...

"If we cannot present a justification for saving the princess that even the Testament Union will accept, everyone will turn against us."

And so her father asked his question by proxy.

“Do you have a just cause for rescuing the princess? Do you have a justification?”

Masazumi gulped.

...*Well...*

“Can one as inexperienced as you answer this question!?”

Aoi’s shout caused her to tremble.

She shrank back, held her breath, and lost all strength for a moment.

Her raised hands lowered and dangled limply by her sides.

As she lowered her head slightly, she realized she looked like a scolded child.

But as her left hand dangled next to her waist, she felt something.

It produced a dry sound.

She then heard a voice from the port side. It was Suzu’s quiet and shrill voice.

“Masa...zumi...!?”

Suzu shook her shoulders and faced Masazumi.

Amid the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers, she was supported by Asama as she looked up at Masazumi on the bridge.

“U-um, M-Masazumi. Masazumi!”

She raised her voice.

“Wh-when your hand...t-touched your clothes...it...it made a noise!”

Masazumi faced her from the bridge. She slowly and weakly gave a questioning expression.

“It...it sounded like paper!” said Suzu.

While supporting her, Asama looked up in surprise. She looked blankly at Masazumi and spoke with a hint of question in her tone.

“Masazumi, do you have a cheat sheet like Toori-kun!?”

Masazumi's expression changed. Her eyebrows shot up, her mouth spread outward, and she started to say something, but then she frantically reached into the pocket binder at her waist.

"Th-this is..."

She pulled out a crumpled piece of paper. It may have been a note because it had something written on it.

But she did not spread it out.

"This is..."

As she held it in both hands, strength filled her elbows. Her right elbow moved up and her left down. It was as if she were trying to tear it in half.

"This is...!"

Masazumi tried to tear apart the paper in her hands.

This was the countermeasure note for this incident that she had put together in the early morning.

It contained her own countermeasure based on her own decisions and the information from the Provisional Council's secretaries.

...It was written there.

Her countermeasure had included a means of justifying their actions and even what the Musashi should do afterwards.

They were all her own ideas, but that brought a certain question to her mind.

...Can one as inexperienced as me give this answer!?

She had been unable to inherit a name, she questioned what exactly a politician was, and she half-hid the fact that she was a girl.

That imperfect, doubting, and false self had indeed produced an answer.

...But what proof do I have that it will be accepted!?

Her father had certainly seen through her thoughts. He had likely realized that she was gathering her own thoughts on the issue. And that was why he was

warning her by asking this question via Aoi.

She could clearly see his warning. If she ignored her own inexperience and continued forward...

...I will be throwing away my future.

She would lose the support of her father and the others around her and her path to the future would close.

She had already failed to inherit a name and now she would cut off her path to being a politician.

And so she held the note in her hand.

It held unnecessary thoughts.

This failure to take her inexperience into account was the source of her grief, anger, and excess emotions and dreams.

If she ripped the paper in two, her father and the Council would accept her and everything would return to normal.

And so...

“This is...!!”

But just as she tried to tear it apart, she heard a sound in front of her.

It was the sound of tearing paper. Aoi had torn apart the cheat sheet in his hand.

“...!?”

As she wondered what was happening, she saw him raise his eyebrows slightly.

He entered her vision while she continued to hang her head.

He remained at a distance, but he had crouched down to peer up at her from below.

“Don’t be silly. I want to hear *your* answer.”

Aoi wanted to hear her answer.

“But...”

“Weren’t you listening? I’m not very smart, I can’t do anything, and I can’t answer these questions myself. The same goes for the others. That money-lover can only count money. Our glasses-wearing author can only talk about history. ...The only one who can talk about politics is you.”

So...

“Who else is going to give their answer here?”

“Bu-...”

“No buts.”

Aoi sat down and slammed the remains of his cheat sheet to the ground.

“Listen!”

She jumped slightly when he suddenly shouted out and pointed at her.

...*Why...?*

Why was this idiot so angry all of a sudden?

She was his enemy here. And yet...

“Listen,” he said again. “You are...! You are our academy’s vice president!”

“ ...”

“Listen. You are the only one among us with any authority left. Do you understand what that means!? Nothing I say here means a thing! But you’re different. You may think you’re representing the Provisional Council, but you’re our vice president.”

She listened.

“You represent us! So give your answer!!”

His shout caused her to jump again.

.../...

What did she want to do?

She did not know.

She always hesitated, lamented, and grew self-centered.

But right now...

.../...

"I...!"

She opened her mouth to speak.

And a voice rose as if in response.

"Masazumi."

They were the words of a will. She interpreted it as a voice, but this was something's will.

But what was using this ability of mutual understanding?

"It can't be..."

She and Aoi both turned toward the voice.

Halfway up the stairs, Adele was holding a bucket. The foundations of her vassal's mobile shell's legs that she wore on her feet created a fair bit of noise as she climbed the steps.

"Oh, am I interrupting? But, um, the chancellor asked me to bring this."

After climbing the stairs, the eyes behind her glasses looked back and forth between Masazumi and Aoi.

Aoi smiled. He faced Adele and indicated Masazumi with a hand. But then he faced the bucket.

"Go for it."

In response, something climbed onto the edge of the bucket.

"Masazumi."

It was a brown algae creature.

"Is that one of those things from the sewers?" asked Asama.

"Yeah," said Naomasa with a bandage on her cheek. "I'm sometimes in charge

of swapping out the purification pod that's filled with them. They don't get very attached to people. They know they're dirty, so they think they would just be a bother. They try to keep their distance and only exchange a greeting."

She smiled.

"I've never heard of one calling anyone by name before."

Masazumi faced the black algae creature's sensory organs.

She only needed to lower her head slightly. Instead of sewage, the bucket Adele held was filled with ink and a few other black algae creatures were floating or submerged in the ink.

"Masazumi," said the one on the edge of the bucket.

But after calling her name again...

"Ah."

It lost its balance and fell outside the bucket.

However, Masazumi reflexively reached for the black-stained creature.

"Oh."

And she caught it in her hands.

With a wet splat, it landed on the paper she held and the black water spread out and covered the writing.

"Thank you," said the creature.

"Don't worry about it."

These creatures had always peered at her from behind Horizon's legs, but this was the first time one had spoken to her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Help."

"Help what?"

"Horizon."

“ ... ”

She was dumbfounded, but the creature continued speaking.

“Help friend.”

A few of the creatures inside the bucket climbed onto the edge.

“Horizon said.”

“Said what?”

“Masazumi is politician.” “Politicians save people.” “In exchange for taxes.”

After that chain of comments, the creature in her hand shook. It went on to produce a small stone in her hand. It was transparent and resembled glass.

...Is this made from the components of the sewage that they couldn't break down because it wasn't trash?

“Three years of work made this.” “Not enough?” “Need more?”

“How can we help Horizon?”

“Well...” she said.

“Help.”

She listened.

“Help, Masazumi.”

Their words made her tremble.

...Dammit.

Masazumi began to wonder what she had come here to do, what she was doing, and what she wanted to do.

But there was one thing she did know. She heard the same words repeated.

“How can we help Horizon?”

“ ... ”

Hearing that, she made up her mind and acted. She slowly moved the black algae creature to the bucket.

“Masazumi?”

As she silently grabbed the stone remaining on her hand, the creatures spoke.

“Paper dirty.” “Sorry.” “Can’t read.”

“It’s fine. I can still read it if I try. And...”

She clenched the stone in her stained hand, clenched the paper in her other hand, and placed the paper in the bucket.

“It’s fine. You can eat it. I have already made up my mind.”

That’s right, she muttered in her heart. *What do I want to do?*

And she answered her own question.

“I wonder if I could save her if I was a politician.”

She thought about who she had once been, who she had been until very recently. She had simply said she wanted to be a politician with no real purpose behind it. But she was now aware of something.

“That’s right.”

She wanted to save lives that were on the verge of being lost.

Her old self had to have felt the same and that was why she asked herself another question.

...Why do I want to be a politician?

“Answer me this.” She raised her head and stopped her gaze on Aoi who was still sitting down. “Aoi Toori, am I a representative of Musashi Ariadust Academy?”

“Of course you are.”

“I see.” She nodded. “Then I will answer the question you gave me. Basically, you want a justification for saving Horizon that applies to the Testament Union as well. You want said justification to avoid the war and the damages to the reservations that will come about from rescuing her.”

“That’s right. Give me your answer.”

“Then,” said Masazumi while looking away from him and toward the front of

the ship.

While holding the bucket of black algae creatures, Adele moved out of the way of her gaze. She could see the people of Musashi in the space this cleared and she spoke to them.

She spoke her countermeasure which she had thought up in the morning and written in that note.

“There is a justification for saving Horizon Ariadust,” she said. “First of all, there is no need for her to take responsibility as Mikawa’s ruler.”

In front of Tres España’s tent, everyone focused on the *cadena firma*.

They had all stopped reaching into the bag of popcorn.

“What is she saying?”

“Last night, Lord Motonobu, ruler of Mikawa, destroyed Mikawa and died in the process,” said the girl in the *cadena firma*. “But that is being viewed as a portion of Mikawa’s destruction rather than as suicide. As such, the responsibility has been shifted to the next ruler.”

But...

“But when Lord Motonobu died, Horizon Ariadust was not his heir. Isn’t that right, Asama? The summary succession confirmation was carried out this morning, correct?”

“Oh, y-yes. That’s right,” said a girl not visible on the screen. “For a Shinto musician, succession confirmation is carried out before their god; but Mikawa’s shrine was lost, so it seems a Shinto spell user traveling with the Testament Union performed the succession confirmation for Mikawa’s ruler. They were from K.P.A. Italia, so I assume they were a helper from Aki’s Itsukushima Shrine. Horizon is a resident of Musashi and has a second-level contract with the Asama Shrine, so we received a report.”

Muneshige and Gin commented without looking away from the screen.

“Aki? That is a very formal shrine. It is built on a floating island, so it is supposedly impregnable.”

“It acts as the Papa-Schola’s fortress now.”

“Now, let me say this,” said the vice president on the screen while sweeping her right hand from left to right. “Horizon Ariadust has no memories of the past and has been living as a resident of Musashi, so she had nothing to do with the destruction of Mikawa. So why must she take responsibility for that destruction?”

“Well...”

The chancellor appeared on the screen. He was frowning and staring down at a new cheat sheet.

“Because she’s the ruler, right?”

“Not necessarily.”

The vice president looked at the chancellor just once before turning back to the screen.

Gin raised one eyebrow slightly.

“That vice president has changed from a moment before. She almost seems to be speaking to us.”

“You think so too?” asked Muneshige.

Gin only nodded and said nothing more.

Who exactly was the vice president trying to speak to?

They could not say and they may have been imagining it at this point.

But she raised a finger toward them again.

“If you insist she take responsibility for something she knew nothing about and had no control over, who would you have had take responsibility if she had not been here? No one knew Mikawa would be destroyed! The only ones who did were lost along with Mikawa. Then who will take responsibility? Do you understand what I am saying?”

“ ... ”

“Do you understand? You are taking someone unrelated to an incident, someone who knew nothing about it until just now, and then suddenly making

them an heir and forcing responsibility onto them! Think carefully. If the Testament Union's method is legitimate, *someone else* would have had to have been made ruler of Mikawa and forced to 'commit suicide' had Horizon not been here. This will set a precedent for making someone an 'heir' and executing them for something they were wholly unrelated to!"

The vice president on the screen took a breath and struck at the air as if swatting something away.

"This is a misuse of the history recreation! This is a devilish system allowing them to execute whoever they want!"

"Wait," said Aoi from next to Masazumi.

Strength left her shoulders as she turned toward him. She exaggerated her motion to get her force, presence, words, and intentions across to the people watching via the divine transmissions carried over ley lines.

"What!?"

"Look, I know you're kind of on a roll right now, but let me speak for a second. You're not just saying Horizon doesn't have to take responsibility; you're saying no one does. In that case, where does responsibility for the destruction of Mikawa go?"

"You want me to tell you?"

Masazumi turned back toward the people. The film crew from the Broadcast Committee stood at the center of the staircase.

...Reach him.

There was one person in particular she needed her will to reach.

While hoping it would happen, she formed more words.

"Mikawa lost its ruler and most of its land. It needs to be reconstructed in the future, but the people can't live without the city infrastructure. They are getting by right now with Musashi's infrastructure and ships loaded with temporary residences. So what can be done about this situation?"

“What?”

She held the fingers of her right hand out toward the film crew.

“Mikawa can be recognized as an aerial city ship and exist alongside Musashi.”

In other words...

“Mikawa will not be lost, so no one must take responsibility.”

“...”

“Are you listening? Mikawa was crucial as a neutral city between Tsirhc and Mlasi, but Musashi can handle that while traveling. If Mikawa exists alongside Musashi, we can recover from the loss of Mikawa without affecting Musashi’s authority!”

She heard surprised voices welling up from below.

But they changed to confused voices and soon excited voices joined in.

“———!?”

A sudden explosion of voices rose into the air.

...Come on.

With that thought, she let out a shout to make the final push.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy uses the previous opinion as a counter-proposal concerning the Testament Union’s treatment of Horizon Ariadust! We request that the Testament Union rethink this! Our justification is as follows! The Testament Union’s current actions are a misuse of the history recreation and their actions are making light of the Testament!”

Her shouted words received an almost immediate response.

“Nothing but sophistry.”

A staticky voice suddenly came from the broadcast.

And...

“...!?”

A man’s face appeared on the broadcast display boards and all the sign frame

style bulletin boards in the area and in the sky.

The man wore a white cloak.

“The pope-chancellor...”

“That’s right.”

Those words of confirmation caused Masazumi to mentally clench her fists.

...Here he is.

The one listening to her words and watching all of her actions beyond the screen had been this man.

He was the representative of the Testament Union. He was the one who had pushed Horizon’s suicide as the means of maintaining history.

If she won in this confrontation against him, everything would change. The people and Musashi would change.

Aoi glanced over at her.

“Seijun, I like the look in your eyes.”

“Aoi, I will be saying some complicated things now.”

She took a breath and ignored the pope-chancellor’s face visible in the air.

She had to face the Broadcast Committee’s film crew rather than the screen in the sky.

She stared straight forward as if looking at the person beyond the screen.

“Aoi, listen carefully. This is what really matters. But...”

There was more to the countermeasure she had thought up that morning.

She did not know if she could complete it or not.

She might grow timid, she might lose confidence, and she might grow utterly confused.

But there was one thing she knew for sure.

“I will make sure to fulfill my role and open a path to Horizon.”

In the tent, Innocentius sat in his chair and faced forward.

He narrowed his eyes as he looked into the camera on the table.

...What a troublesome lot.

This was the duty of the leader of the Catholics who worshipped the Testament and preserved the history recreation.

The suicide of Mikawa's princess was not a part of history, but it was a historically legitimate means of taking responsibility and it would make up for the destruction of Mikawa.

The people of Musashi were shouting in excitement, but...

"It is an empty argument." he said. "You, vice president. You just said what you would do, did you not?"

"Yes, I did."

"No, not 'yes'. Use 'judge'. Your people are being judged, remember?"

What an obvious provocation, he thought. But as the Catholic leader, I can't overlook someone who ignores the Testament Union's decision.

The leader had to set an example for everyone else. He could not allow himself to waver in the slightest.

"You want us to free Mikawa's princess because she is unrelated to the incident? A nice idea. A very nice idea indeed. It's been a while...a good long while since I've heard that."

He took a breath.

"But I have heard that appeal for a life thousands if not tens of thousands of times."

Of course he had.

"We follow the Testament descriptions and recreate history. But there will always be discrepancies. We may be able to see a hundred years into the future, but our knowledge and imagination of the former Age of the Gods is lacking, our supply of people and materials is insufficient, and we must put up with the harsh environment and intentional obstacles. And so we must

eliminate these discrepancies.”

“Are you suggesting the suicide of Horizon Ariadust, an unrelated princess, will help eliminate these discrepancies?”

“Are you suggesting we allow the discrepancies to exist?”

Musashi’s vice president closed her mouth.

“...”

And she felt silent.

The silence that followed brought some slight admiration to Innocentius.

...Oh?

If she had said they would allow the discrepancies, that Far Eastern academy would be ignoring the history recreation and could be dealt with accordingly.

But Musashi’s vice president had avoided that mistake.

...I see.

When she had spoken out before, he had assumed she was merely lost in using her words to attack.

...But...

He adjusted his position in his chair.

He crossed his legs, let his right hand dangle outside the chair, and placed his left hand on his crossed leg.

His waist was placed halfway along the chair.

He looked at the screen and then turned toward the camera.

“Let us talk.” He took a breath. “Let us talk about the proper state of the world.”

Chapter 32: Absolute Supporter

CHAPTER 32

"Absolute Supporter"



Who is there

No matter what happens?

Point Allocation (Mr. Impossible)

Who is there

No matter what happens?

Point Allocation (Mr. Impossible)

Masazumi felt the stillness around her.

There was some wind and the raised bridge produced a soft whistling noise as it scraped away at that movement of the air. The nearby trees shook and the nature district down below produced a wavelike rustling noise.

However, the people were staring at the sign frames around them. They all displayed the face of Pope-Chancellor Innocentius, leader of K.P.A. Italia.

“Errors in the history recreation are easily created for the convenience of our cultures or civilizations,” he said. “Everyone prefers what is convenient and they will want to choose that method if they know it exists. That is why the history recreation based on the Testament descriptions is always accompanied by ‘interpretations’.”

However...

“But these interpretations are not about convenience. Isn’t that right?” Innocentius spoke in a low, disinterested tone. “A leader committing suicide to take responsibility for his or her nation is the rule of the Far East in this age. That is how history must proceed. It is only natural. ...And what is wrong with using a historically accurate interpretation? But you are ignoring the proper rule of taking responsibility with suicide and you are trying to use the idea of interpretations as an excuse.”

“But...”

Masazumi chose her words carefully.

...What should I do?

How could she guide the conversation in the direction she wanted?

“But, your holiness, your interpretation will lead to the loss of an unrelated and innocent citizen.”

“Oh? ...The ‘loss’? Is that what you said? Then let me teach you a wonderful word: martyrdom. Do you know what that means? It is a noble sacrifice.”

And so...

“She will not be lost. She will make a choice and continue on ahead in order to lead the people along the path of history that seeks the Testament. Whether she wants it or not, that is the path wanted for history. Do you understand?”

That’s what I thought he’d say, thought Masazumi as she mentally clicked her tongue.

He had a prepared response for this. As he had said before, he had likely held this exact same conversation countless times in his years at the top of Catholicism. There had to have been countless times when someone tried to bring an end to the history recreation.

But no records remained of those rebellions.

...Because he defeated his opponent in these discussions and “interpreted” it as some historical rebellion or another.

She decided that, at the very least, she could not let him turn this incident into some sort of interpretation.

But...

“And how about I continue, hm? You said you would make up for Mikawa by merging it with Musashi and therefore keeping it in existence. But what will you do about the industrial dealings that used Mikawa’s productivity and Ley line reactors?”

“Well...”

“I think I know what you are saying. You are saying Mikawa belongs to the Far East and can therefore ignore its association with the Testament Union as that is not part of the history recreation.”

But...

“Surely you know that is out of the question. You just said you could not allow any errors in the recreation of the Testament’s history descriptions and now you are claiming our actions are errors? Do not be ridiculous.”

Gin frowned at Innocentius's words and stuck her chopsticks into the bag of popcorn.

"The discussion is veering off track."

"The normal people listening won't notice. That is an error in itself and insisting on a rebuttal would not help."

Everyone turned toward them with questioning looks, so Muneshige folded his arms and nodded.

"The Papa-Schola is supplying response after response at a quick pace. I believe he is intentionally challenging her by lining up so many arguments. By bringing up so many different opinions in opposition of his opponent's, he is rejecting her and refusing to accept her stance. Simply noticing a small deviation in the argument is a small thing overall. After all, he is constantly continuing on to the next topic without obsessing over any one point. By the time she finds fault with one, he has already evaded her rebuttal by continuing on to the next topic."

"But...is there a meaning to this? Simply rejecting your opponent's stance like that would either mean they are both right or they are both wrong. Wouldn't this create an unproductive situation where neither stance is accepted?"

"Only someone who does not want their argument rejected would say it is unproductive to line up counterarguments like this." Muneshige spoke while watching the exchange on the screen. "This is an exchange of points of view between the two of them. If you do not accept that, you will be forced to comprehend the opponent's point of view. And in this exchange of counterarguments, one can discard their point of view to eliminate their opponent's point of view. And if their opponent cannot keep up with the mutual destruction of points of view..." He took a breath. "It proves that their opponent is speaking only from their own point of view."

And...

"That is the Papa-Schola's tactic. No one can stand up to the massive amount of Catholic 'points of view' that he has built up over the years. And after his

opponent runs out, he will still have a point of view left to speak from. And he is carrying that out in this high-speed exchange. He has already begun lining up his counterarguments. But to him, this is not a negotiation or a debate. He is merely choosing the words he has accumulated in the past.”

“Then...” Gin turned around. “What if the vice president asks him to stop?”

“This exchange of counterarguments is accomplished when one’s opponent negates your own argument with a point of view of equal value. In other words, this is a provocation and test for those who do not realize any argument can be handled depending on one’s point of view. If she asks him to stop, it means she is angry because her own argument is flawed and she cannot form a common point of view with her opponent. That would mean she has lost the debate.”

“Then...”

Everyone watched the screen.

How was she supposed to bring this to an end?

Masazumi thought.

...I see.

She had caught on to her opponent’s tactic. It was a scorched earth strategy using an exchange of counterarguments. He had accumulated far more arguments than her, so he could survive while continuing this mutual destruction of arguments.

It was a simple method. By showing discrepancies in point of view, he could accept yet reject his opponent’s opinion.

There was a reason he did not make any blatant rejections.

...When dealing with the Protestants, he needs a way to avoid responsibility for any trouble.

His defenses were strong. If she was to change the flow of the exchange...

“Was freezing the finances of the reservations also a means of correcting an error?”

By asking a question, she could avoid introducing an argument and allowing him to provide a counterargument.

But...

“Once we determine our points of view on the princess’s suicide, that answer will make itself known on its own. It is only a secondary problem. Isn’t there something else we should be discussing, hm?”

Rather than answering her question, he focused on the discussion of the primary problem. He was merely narrowing down the topic of discussion to reduce her options for arguments and corner her more quickly.

Also...

“Hey, hey! Masazumi! Are you winning!? Are you winning!?”

The idiot behind her was incredibly annoying. He was currently jumping up and down behind her.

“Y’see! Y’see! I’m pretty stupid, so I don’t understand this! But do you have eight secret plans in progress to bring you victory with a double score bonus!? Well, do you!?”

...Ugh... Honestly.

“Quiet down, Aoi. I can’t concentrate.”

“Oh! Is that it!? Do you get more excited when things are silent!?”

“Excited? Excited?” added a voice from the bucket on the ground.

Meanwhile, Aoi walked down the stairs and toward the starboard side. After a while, he came back with products the Council members sold or produced and he began holding them up toward the film crew. She glanced over as he held something up.

“The standard breakfast with the IZUMO label! Pour milk on it and eat it! It’s an extra-large curry!!”

Hassan ran over and helped Aoi hold up the box with a thumbs up.

When Masazumi turned around and swung up her fist, the idiot frantically fled to the starboard side.

“Koni-tan! Seijun’s super scary! ...Oh, do you need something to drink, Koni-tan?”

“Shh! Shh! Don’t call me that in front of people! ...Oh, I’ll have tea.”

Are they close? wondered Masazumi with a tilt of the head, but everyone on the starboard side frantically shook their heads.

“Socializing! It’s just socializing!” they shouted in unison. “Connections are important!!”

She felt that was something they should avoid saying publicly, but it may not have mattered as the Council was exclusive to Musashi. Aoi also seemed to socialize with the influential merchants and city officials.

...He really is selfish and in a way...

But that thought gave her the answer she wanted.

She knew how to bring an end to the current situation.

The wind blew through. With mid-afternoon leading to late-afternoon, the wind from the mountains contained a hint of a western scent.

As that wind washed over him, Innocentius sighed.

...Will this end soon?

As soon as he thought that, Musashi’s vice president asked another question.

“After the destruction of Mikawa, a summary succession confirmation was performed on the princess, but she was not the heir at the time of the destruction. To make her the heir later and have her take responsibility is merely forcibly smoothing things over, is it not?”

“What matters is having responsibility taken in a way that is historically acceptable. Our stance requires that we correct the error.”

He crushed her argument with his own.

And another question arrived.

“Then why did you carry out the summary succession confirmation in secret?”

The princess was a resident of Musashi, so it should have been held at the Asama Shrine. Why wasn't it?"

"Her suicide still would have been held even if it was, so we used the shrine network to settle the issue swiftly and bring her under our protection before any further trouble could occur. Either method would have resulted in the same answer, so we chose the easier one."

He crushed it again.

He knew she was running out. Her repeated questions were proof of that. She was running out of actual arguments, so she could only ask him questions.

...This is less amusing than I thought it would be.

He would speak, parry, occasionally crush her argument, and otherwise make both of their arguments "irrelevant". It took time, but it paved the way to victory.

Eventually, she would run out of arguments and questions.

When that happened, most of his opponents would say that 'negotiations had broken down' and justify their opposition.

But it was not that they had broken down. That was merely a means of saving face for those who had been unable to keep up with the accumulated arguments of Tsirhc Catholicism and had been unable to find a common point of view. And there was only one type of common point of view Innocentius would accept.

...One that stands on the side of Catholicism.

That massive sect had existed since ancient times. It would not waver in the face of others' points of view. If it did waver, it would no longer be something the people of the world could rely on.

And so he would assume his opponent's hostility while accepting their arguments yet rebutting them with one of his many arguments. After the fact, it would be clear he had not acted hostilely toward them.

His current opponent was walking down that path.

"I see."

On the screen, he saw his opponent place a hand on her chin.

“It would appear we hold parallel points of view.”

Innocentius said nothing. If he agreed, it would mean he was lessening his efforts to unify their opinions.

Catholicism would not fall for its opponent’s invitation.

And so that opponent spoke once more.

“Then let me make myself clear.” She took a breath. “I accept that we – the Testament Union and us – have conflicting values. Your holiness, I believe you would agree with me there. Would I be correct in that assumption?”

“No. I believe we can reach an understanding if we continue this discussion.”

He gave an inward bitter smile as he said that.

...So it is time for the opponent to show clear opposition, is it?

She would now declare their separation using those “conflicting values” as the reason.

The way she had said it made it sound like neither side was willing to accept the other.

But that was not the case. Catholicism had not given up on achieving mutual understanding. He did not view understanding as a lost cause.

His opponent had simply claimed that it went both ways to justify her actions.

He could not allow her to escape by forcing responsibility of her own failure to understand on both of them.

“Listen,” he said. “We have time and we may not have another chance to have a relaxed conversation like this, so why not work at it until we reach an agreement? If we talk it out, I am sure we will reach an understanding. Am I wrong, hm?”

“I see.” His opponent formed a smile. “Are you saying we will eventually reach a path we can walk down together? We may be passing by each other now, but you believe we will eventually be able to walk together?”

“Testament. Exactly. We do not want to fight.”

What a farce, thought Innocentius with a nod. *They try so hard to find a way to oppose us, but I seal that path as well.*

He had shown that he absolutely believed they could come to an understanding. For negotiations to break down, his opponent would have to reject his stance of seeking mutual understanding and declare their opposition.

But Musashi's vice president answered with a smile.

"That is good to hear." Her smile remained as she spoke. "If you truly believe we can talk it out and reach an understanding no matter what we do, then you will work toward that understanding and not interfere with what we are about to do. That is a wonderful decision, your holiness."

"What?" muttered Gin as the vice president displayed on the *Tres Españan cadena firma* looked to the right.

That vice president turned raised eyebrows toward the port side and waved her hand.

"Shirojiro! Work with the merchants on the starboard side to prepare for unified control of Musashi's finances! To aid the reservations whose finances have been frozen, Musashi will use its own finances to make an unsecured loan of the amount frozen, handle all of the reservations' internal financial transactions via divine transmission, and construct a means of handling everything on the Musashi!"

Furthermore...

"Keep in mind the possibility of issuing a new currency. It is possible the Testament Union will suddenly release the frozen funds to create economic confusion!"

And...

"Asama! Send Aki's Itsukushima Shrine a written protest and a request to redo the summary succession confirmation! The official contracts between Mikawa's Princess Horizon Ariadust and a shrine – that is, the birthplace contract with the shrine of her birthplace and the 2nd level resident contract

with the shrine of her current residence – were both with the Asama Shrine as she was born on and lives on the Musashi. As such, her Shinto rituals should be performed at that shrine. Protest that it is a violation of your authority to have a crucial succession ritual done elsewhere when the Asama Shrine was so nearby. Also, request to have that treated as a ‘provisional contract’ and thus must be redone! If they refuse, it will mean Itsukushima is ignoring other shrines!”

Gin listened as the vice president shouted instructions.

“What?” she slowly but clearly spoke. “These interpretations are absurdly selfish!”

“Testament. We Catholics are well known for waiting until our opponent destroys themselves and this vice president is using it against the Papa-Schola.”

Muneshige touched the *cadena firma* and raised the cross-shaped volume slider.

“To ensure one does not become the aggressor and to ensure one’s enemy does, Catholics will reject that opponent yet they must accept that opponent alongside themselves. No matter what absurd thing that opponent tries to do, you reject it yet must allow it.”

Musashi’s vice president could be heard speaking with a smile in her voice.

“Musashi Ariadust understands that it holds three parallel views with the Testament Union.”

The vice president raised one finger.

“First, the Testament Union has frozen the reservations’ finances, so we will provide them with loans.”

She raised another finger.

“Second, the Testament Union has made Horizon Ariadust Mikawa’s ruler with a summary inheritance confirmation, so we have had the proper shrine send a protest and suspension.”

She raised another finger.

“And third, the Testament Union is insisting that an unrelated citizen commit suicide to take responsibility.”

The vice president was now looking at the people below her rather than the screen.

With three fingers raised, she spoke loudly so everyone could hear.

“So Musashi Ariadust Academy will send Horizon Ariadust a recommendation for enrollment and make her a student of Musashi in order to protect her from this misuse of the Testament’s history recreation!”

She took a breath.

“Only a student can oppose a student! The Far East has concluded that Horizon Ariadust’s status as a non-student led the Testament Union to grow overeager in their protection of the Testament descriptions! As such, Musashi Ariadust Academy shall make her a student and protect her in order to fulfill our parallel stance!”

Her cry quickly received a response.

“Sophistry.”

Innocentius’s calm voice contained some static in the transmission.

“Nothing but sophistry.”

The vice president’s eyebrows rose as she stared from the screen.

Everyone gulped, but Muneshige let out a breath and adjusted his position in his seat.

“She understands. She must have footage of the Papa-Schola, but *cadena firma* can’t record footage, so she must be looking toward their Broadcast Committee’s film crew instead,” he said. “Now then. Sophistry is a nice word. And it’s also the first thing the Papa-Schola said in this argument.”

Masazumi looked toward her enemy who existed beyond the film crew.

And...

“Your holiness, if you are saying you have been making sound arguments, it just means we have formed parallel views using what you view as sophistry.”

Just a bit further, she thought. Right now, it’s just sophistry.

It was nothing more than excuses meant to destroy her opponent's words.

...But that destruction has begun.

When the pope-chancellor had been destroying her arguments with the exchange of counterarguments, two options had been available to her.

She could have chosen to grow angry and seek opposition.

Or she could have chosen to reject opposition and accept the pope-chancellor's words.

Masazumi's choice had essentially been a synthesis of the two. She had accepted that she understood the pope-chancellor while keeping his opinions as parallel views. And then she had justified her opposition.

But, she thought. I need to go just a bit further.

Presently, she had only stated their opposition. They might attempt to stop the Pope-Chancellor and the Testament Union, but they had not taken any measures to prevent the damage that would cause.

Any kind of fight would be done with no defense and it would leave behind a grudge.

She had to think about how to settle this without an actual fight.

...But he isn't backing down.

As the Catholic leader, the Pope-Chancellor had to act as an example for those following him and thus he could not back down from someone opposing him.

...In that case...

That was when she heard a voice.

"You intend to protect your parallel views, don't you?"

It was Innocentius's calm voice.

However...

...It can't be.

"!?"

She looked up with a look of realization.

The Pope-Chancellor spoke the words she could not.

“That is unfortunate. Listen. The Testament Union does not wish for conflict.”

Do you understand?

“And what view is parallel to that of not wishing for conflict?”

Those words took the parallel rails and made Musashi’s view a desire for conflict.

The people gathered on Musashi’s streets and plazas reacted to that.

They first showed slight confusion, exchanged glances, and finally...

“...!?”

An uneasy stir came over them all at once. It spread like a wave and caused the people to look up at Masazumi.

But Masazumi had a certain thought about that atmosphere that resembled fear.

...I was right.

She took a breath.

...He played the war card.

And...

“We wish for peace, but it seems you and your parallel views see things differently? Isn’t that right?”

The man asked her a question.

She had two options: accept the conflict or surrender.

...What should I do?

The surrounding people looked up at her, awaiting her words.

Suddenly, Innocentius sat up a bit and smiled.

“If you retract your statements and surrender, we will overlook any spirit of

opposition you might have shown.”

Also...

“We will free the finances of the reservations. And how about this?” he said.
“We will return Musashi’s authority and permit its merger with Mikawa.”

He conceded some ground. He placed some bait to make it easier for her to surrender.

It was quite a concession.

Unfreezing the reservations’ finances would prevent the chaos of poverty and allow the reservations to continue existing. He was saying they would not take full control of the Far East via the natural destruction of the reservations.

That meant they would not lose everything.

Even if Musashi lost its authority, the presence of the reservations would give the people an option other than joining the ruling nation.

The Pope-Chancellor was saying they would gain a lot from surrendering here.

But Masazumi was still unsure.

...What is going on?

Even if it was only an unofficial verbal promise, wasn’t he going too far with this concession?

As she wondered why, she added another question.

...Why is he going this far to maintain Horizon’s suicide?

She did not understand and so she asked a question.

“Pope-Chancellor. Please think of this as a parallel view.” She spoke to Innocentius via the film crew. “I do not want to know the details of Horizon’s Logismoí Óplo.”

“Oh?” he replied. As he sat up in his chair, his right arm dangled down. “So you caught on. In that case, I will tell you. ...As you must have suspected, we just received a report from Tres España concerning Horizon Ariadust’s Logismoí Óplo.”

As he spoke, he produced a six-winged female angel in a white cloak on his shoulder.

The super-deformed angel opened a *cornice firma* made of white crosses in front of his face. As she held the *cornice firma* up, he glanced down at it.

“Based on the internal data found during the inspection, the Logismoi Óplo sealed within Mikawa’s princess’s body is named P-01s or Ólos Phtonos. It is the Logismoi Óplo in charge of Phtonos or Envy, which was newly added when the seven deadly sins were created. As for what it does...”

“Yes?”

Innocentius glanced toward her with narrowed eyes.

“It has no combat ability, but it can control all the other Logismoi Óplo. In other words, Ólos Phtonos is the controlling OS that gathers all of the Logismoi Óplo into a single weapon.”

“Do you understand what that means?” asked Innocentius over all the broadcasts. “The deadly sins are all said to correspond to a demon from the Age of the Gods. In Phtonos’s case, that is the Leviathan. That great dragon possesses aspects of all other beasts. It has no power itself and it envies all others, but it can gather all those other powers. Last night, Lord Motonobu of Mikawa said one could influence the apocalypse with the Logismoi Óplo, didn’t he?”

But...

“But why did he give his own daughter the ability to control the gathered Logismoi Óplo? The Testament Union views that as the Far East rebelling in order to conquer the world. As you are forbidden to own weapons of mass destruction, the possession of Ólos Phtonos is illegal. And it also must be viewed as an intention to conquer the nations who possess the other Logismoi Óplo, don’t you think?”

Well?

“Do you still wish to rescue this princess? If you do, it will certainly lead to all-

out war. Surely you did not think her Logismoι Óplo would be of some use. After all, Ólos Phtonos has no offensive ability and it shows your intention to gather the other weapons.”

Masazumi slowly took a deep breath.

...That does it.

Just as she had created a situation in which she could speak on an equal level, he had rejected her.

...If we rescue Horizon, it will mean an all-out war with the Testament Union.

On top of that, Horizon’s Logismoι Óplo did not possess the offensive power needed to stop their opponent.

Rescuing Horizon would not save them, but it would give their opponent a justification for war.

It was a unilateral disadvantage.

...What do I do?

Weighing the advantages against the disadvantages told her to not rescue Horizon.

“This was fun. It’s been a while since someone challenged me like this. If you ignore my energetic cousin, everyone around me either does what I say or says nothing.”

Wait, thought Masazumi. Don’t just bring this to an end.

But...

“Honda Masazumi.”

“...”

Having her name suddenly called made her gulp.

She was the vice president of Musashi’s Student Council. The Testament Union had investigated her during the election, so it was not surprising that he knew about her. What bothered her was why he was calling her name.

“It is very strange. You are saying we should accept errors in the history recreation, but is that because you and your father failed to inherit historical names and no interpretations were used to save you?”

“...!?”

She reflexively embraced her own chest.

She could see the people gathered below the stairs and on the street looking up at her. They did not immediately understand what Innocentius had meant and they stared at her with eyes that asked her if it was true or not.

With countless suspicious gazes on her, she felt something cold on her back.

But then more words came. They were spoken with Innocentius’s amused tone of voice.

“Isn’t that right? A failed inheritor like you would want to oppose the strict actions of a name-inheritor like me even without a good reason.”

Wait, she thought. Don’t decide that for me.

...I want to be a politician...

She was not standing here out of simple rebelliousness and yet this man was defining her actions for her.

“Isn’t that right, Honda Masazumi? There are times when you want to reject the natural course of the world. After all...”

...Stop.

“In your attempt to inherit a name, you began a sex-change operation, but you failed to inherit the name partway through.”

He said it.

“You had your breasts removed, but everything else remains unchanged, isn’t that right? You remain an incomplete girl, but you dress like a boy despite not inheriting the name. Why is that? You have hidden your failed name inheritance and your true identity. Why has a fake like you come to this place where one must earn people’s trust? You believe your lies are acceptable as long as they are not found out and I can only assume you are drunk on the power and that

you merely wish to oppose the authority of inherited names.”

Masazumi gulped.

A cold sweat covered her body. As she wrapped her arms around herself, she remained perfectly still without even trembling.

...I do not believe my lies are acceptable and I am not drunk on power.

She denied the accusations in her heart, but the people before her only stared silently at her.

However, she could tell their gazes were different now. Innocentius’s words had changed those gazes into something else.

It was over.

The people would now look at her in a fundamentally different way.

A small number of people knew she was a girl and that she had undergone a sex change operation.

But most of the people gathered here, focusing on her, and listening to what was said did not know. Nor did they know why she was hiding that she was a girl.

She had her own reasons for wearing a male uniform.

She felt she did not look right in a female uniform after removing her breasts and she felt wrong wearing a uniform meant for a girl after trying to change her body.

As her breasts would never return, she had thought about eventually completing the sex change process.

But most people did not know that. And arguing about it here would be meaningless. After all, it was true that she had failed to inherit a name and that she was hiding her body. Also, she had not earned enough trust for people to accept her rebuttal.

She knew how people reacted when they learned the truth of her body. It had happened a lot at Mikawa. Countless times, they had started avoiding her and

became unnecessarily considerate.

...That is why I started reading books and doing other things to make being alone easier.

After she had lost her mother, she had quickly decided to move to Musashi.

In Musashi, the truth had spread through the girls of her class. She had needed to reveal it during the Student Council election and the physical examinations.

Of course, all of them had made sure not to spread the information.

However, that was being presented as her spreading sedition among the people while keeping that secret.

And on top of that...

“Honda Masazumi. You did well. I really think so.”

He clapped his hands as he spoke. She wondered what he meant, but her gaze had dropped and she could do nothing but hold her own body and listen to him speak.

“I have an idea. If you take back everything you have said, I will give you a position within the Testament Union.”

She listened.

“I will also guarantee the safety of those with a connection to you as well as the reservations of Musashi residents. I promise they will be treated well in the nations they join. You may have failed to inherit a name, but I, the Papa-Schola, will give you this honor.”

...He’s giving me a way out.

He had first revealed the truth of her body to distance her from everyone else.

But then he had closed that gap by praising her confrontation and saying her actions here would ensure the favorable treatment of the people.

Currently, he stood between her and the people.

“You have shown opposition, made harsh decisions to make up for your

losses, and hid what kind of person you are, but how about we wipe the slate clean? And to do that, how about you retract everything you said and bring all these troubles to an end, hm?”

She heard him speak.

“What will you do? Musashi Representative Honda Masazumi, for the sake of peace, give me your...”

Before he could say “answer”, another voice spoke up from in front of Masazumi.

“Hey, Seijun!”

She looked up in surprise when she heard Aoi’s voice.

In front of her was the sky, the countless sign frames showing Innocentius’s face, and the crowd of Musashi people looking up at her.

But a dejected face stood in front of them all.

“Hey, hey, Seijun! Are you really a girl!?”

“...What?”

...Wait. Wasn’t that information given out during the Student Council election?

From the look on his face, it seemed he had not read the information even if it had been.

And then he raised a finger toward her.

A serious expression replaced his smile.

“W-wait just a second, okay!?”

“Wh-what is it?”

As she frowned as if to say “hurry it up”, he turned toward everyone else and raised his finger as if trying to lead them.

“Okay, time to check!”

“Eh? Ah, wait!”

She had a vague idea what he was going to do, so she frantically covered her chest.

But Aoi did something else this time.

He crouched down and held his arms forward as if planning to tackle her.

“Here goes!”

He suddenly grabbed her pants and pulled them down to her ankles.



Honda Masazumi

Everyone saw.

As Masazumi froze in place while holding her chest, Toori flipped up the bottom of her shirt to reveal what lay beneath.

“Ah, your inner’s panties are the female type that uses strings. They don’t sell just the bottom very often.”

As she lightly rubbed her thighs together, a white cloth was visible at the point where the skin of her inner thigh joined together.

As he crouched down, Toori ignored the people gesturing for him to move out of the way so they could see. He stuck his right palm between her legs and raised it.

“Eh?”

As Masazumi came back to her senses, Toori touched her underwear.

As Toori continued to move, her face grew redder and redder.

“Wait...what...stop...”

She frantically closed her legs, but it was too late. He continued on.

“Oh.”

“No... Ah!”

As she cried out, she tightened her elbows while covering her chest and frowned.

“Nn...”

She groaned, but quickly shook her head and adjusted.

“Wh-what do you think you’re doing!?”

Toori responded by slowly and calmly standing up.

The force of the sudden action caused her to take a frantic half-step backwards, but Toori went on to turn around and look across the gathered crowd. He then tilted his body as if to stare at them all again.

“Totally a girl!”

Everyone let out an excited cheer.

Meanwhile, Masazumi ignored her disheveled bangs and spoke.

“Y-you idiot, wh-what are you-...”

Just as she frantically grabbed her pants and tried to pull them up to the hard points at her waist, Toori turned around and used both hands to touch her chest which was left defenseless due to grabbing her pants with both hands.

Toori clearly pressed in against her chest while she motionlessly gasped again.

After a moment, he turned toward the crowd once more and gave two thumbs up.

“Nice flat chest!”

For some reason, the people let out an even greater cheer than before.

Finally, Toori turned toward Masazumi.

“So what was that he said? You had some kind of surgery!?”

“Um, well... I don’t feel like dealing with this, so go sit over there.”

As she narrowed her eyes too much and saw nothing but white, Toori shook his head and body as a sign of refusal. He then spoke to her again.

“Were you that desperate to have a flat chest!? Do you love flat chests that much!? Do you!?”

Masazumi kneed him in the gut.

Masazumi tried to stomp on the idiot as he writhed on the ground, but he crawled speedily away.

And so she spoke instead.

“Th-there are some things you don’t say to people!”

“But looking at the result, you did become a guy! You got a flat chest!”

“No, that isn’t what happened.”

“Oh? It isn’t? Then are you saying you have huge breasts!?”

“What kind of false dichotomy is that?” muttered the crowd, but Masazumi

thought there was more to the issue.

“B-but there are people who worry about that kind of thing!” she said.

“Oh? Are you saying you’re one of those people? If so, I apologize. You can take revenge by groping my flat chest and sticking your hand into my crotch. ... How about it?”

That direct question led her to think.

...Huh?

It had certainly bothered her. After all, she had been driven to tears in the graveyard while recalling the past.

But now she had had her pants pulled down, the area between her legs touched, and her chest touched.

“Well, Seijun? Do you worry about your body?”

“Right now, overall rage is winning out over any individual worry!!”

She had indeed removed her breasts and she had heard her body could never be returned to normal. That was why she had cast aside herself as a girl and focused on politics. Yet now this idiot was asking her about it.

“Can you have kids?”

“What? ...Oh, yes. I didn’t go that far with the surgery. But I removed my breasts and if I ever did have a child...”

When she told them the truth, what would the child think and what look would she see on the child’s face?

“Don’t worry!” said Aoi. “A flat chested woman’s kid will grow up to love flat chests!!”

“And who told you that!? The voices in your head!? Some distant part of the heavens!?”

“Don’t be stupid. I know you can do a good job, so I’m just saying any kid you raise will definitely love you.”

That isn’t true, she thought. My father...

She started to say he was wrong, but he cut her off.

“All of Horizon’s emotions and stuff were made into the Logismoι Óplo,” he said with an embarrassed smile. “And now they’re saying she has to commit suicide as the ruler of Mikawa. I think her dad had to be a horrible person to create a situation like this. But still... If he’d hated Horizon, he would have made all of her into the Logismoι Óplo without leaving her soul.”

He turned his smile toward Masazumi.

“I don’t know what things are like between you and your dad. But you don’t stop your carriage in the middle of work for someone you hate or don’t care about, so I know there’s something there. Of course, I know he’s an annoying old man, so he might be a pain to deal with,” he said. “But that just means you need to make up for it by doing a good job with your own kid.”

Masazumi felt a warmth inside her stomach and it quickly rose to her face.

...Dammit.

She understood.

She understood what he was saying to her. But...

“D-don’t be stupid. Wh-who ever said anything about having a child. For one thing, do you really think I can get married with a body like this!?”

“Okay, who here loves flat chests!?”

On the port side, Ohiroshiki threw his hand into the air.

“I do! I do!”

“Okay, I was just asking!”

Cold gazes turned toward Ohiroshiki.

“Eh? A-agh! I was the only one to fall for it again! No fair! This is just silly!! And you’re all mistaken! Honda-kun is over ten, so she’s too old!”

“Quit trying to hide your embarrassment. And Seijun gets a say, so think about her feelings too. Plus, no one else is going to raise their hand once you start so forcefully. Honestly, you act like that question is the most important thing in the world.”

Masazumi saw quite a few people nodding in response.

...There are a lot of people who like that kind of thing. Not that that solves the problem.

As she thought, a voice came from the broadcast.

“How long are you going to continue with this nonsense?”

It was Innocentius.

After Innocentius’s words brought silence, he continued speaking.

“How about we stay on topic? Honda Masazumi, I believe we have already determined what we each have to gain in our discussion.”

His deep voice put Masazumi on guard. The negotiation was not over.

...And I’m at the disadvantage.

The man continued with a suggestion.

“Honda Masazumi, I have a suggestion as thanks for the enjoyment you have given me here.”

“...What is it?”

“If you retract everything you have said here, I will recognize your accurate decision and allow you your inherited name.”

“...”

She wondered what look was on her father’s face at the moment.

“The Testament Union and the Far East will engage in many negotiations from now on. During those negotiations, you will be able to help the people of the Far East if you possess a connection to me. And if you successfully inherit a historical name, we will have no issues with speaking officially with you or introducing you to others. Also, the people of Musashi would feel more secure if they were represented by someone with an inherited name, would they not? How about it? Am I wrong?”

And...

“If you do this, the state of your body will not have been for nothing.”

...This is the final push.

It would benefit Musashi, the people of the Far East, and herself.

But, she thought. Something about this bothers me.

...What is it?

She could not put it in words well, but she felt she should say something.

And then...

“Ahh!? What do you think you’re saying!?”

The idiot moved in front of her and boldly pointed at the sign frame in the sky rather than the film crew.

“You... Yeah, you! Stop bullying Seijun!”

With every word, he jabbed his finger toward the image of the person he spoke to.

“Y’know what!? I...! I hate...! I really, reeeeeally hate people like you!!!!”

What is this idiot saying now? wondered Masazumi.

Aoi’s words left Masazumi speechless, but he continued on.

“I don’t really know the details, but Seijun’s been worrying about this inherited name stuff and this stuff about her body for a long time! It’s been a real big deal!”

Masazumi felt he was going too far with that, but she felt something similar to embarrassment inside her.

Meanwhile, he raised both arms.

“Listen. Lately, Seijun has almost never been showing up to class! She’s a poor girl who’s on the verge of dropping out of the Academy! She keeps going to the graveyard to sit all alone and hum to herself!”

“...Wait.”

“And right after transferring here, she was faced by the breast success stories of Asama, Masa, and my sis! Her belief in flat chests was shaken and she started to have second thoughts about the alterations she had made in the secret underground facility of the Church of the Flat Chest. Yesterday, it got so bad it interfered with her meditation!”

“Wait just a minute.”

Her protest caused the idiot to turn toward her, raise his eyebrows, and shout back in a falsetto voice.

“You keep quiet! Your mother will not let that idiot get away with this!”

Wait, wait, wait, she thought as he turned back toward Innocentius’s face.

“Hey, you!”

For a moment, Aoi remained perfectly still.

Finally, he turned back toward Masazumi with a frown.

He pointed toward Innocentius’s face.

“Who is this guy anyway?”

“Ehhh!?”

As everyone cried out, Masazumi frantically answered him.

“You don’t know!? That’s the Pope-Chancellor! You need to know these things! He may never stop talking, but he’s really important!”

“Ehh? But I never bother to remember guys’ names. Oh! Maybe that’s why I instinctively remembered your name.”

“If your instincts are that good, try using your brain for once!!”

“Instincts are important, you know?” The idiot folded his arms and began his explanation. “For example, I thought there was something wrong with me, but it turns out I’m perfectly normal.”

“In what possible way are you normal?”

“I’d thought you were a guy with a nice slender waist, but whenever you walk or climb the stairs, the way you shake your butt made the beast inside me wag

its tail and stick out its tongue. I felt like I had to tell myself to stay. Quite the wild beast, aren't I?"

"Have you ever thought how it feels to be the one you say these things to?"

"Don't worry about it. ...No, do worry about it! It's you I'm talking about! Anyway, since I was reacting to a guy's butt, I thought my gauge had increased so far that I'd unlocked a hidden gauge, but it turns out you're actually a girl. That means there wasn't anything wrong with me getting a bit excited."

"There is definitely something wrong with it!"

"Really? ...Hey, all you guys out there! When a good-looking girl is walking all feminine-like in front of you, how many of you aren't drawn to her butt?"

All of the male residents of Musashi exchanged a glance. And...

"..."

"Okay, I win!"

"Ehhh?"

As she cried out, a voice she had forgotten about returned.

"Such nonsense." After the deep noise of Innocentius's sigh, he continued. "Are you bringing this idiot into this to prevent a proper conclusion now that you know you are at a disadvantage?"

"N-no. I was..."

"What!?" cut in the idiot. "What are you talking about, you big idiot!?"

He might as well be picking a fight now, thought Masazumi while unable to say anything.

Aoi on the other hand, spoke.

"Listen! Listen up! I've been listening to you and Seijun this whole time and I don't get what you've been talking about!"

"You don't? Are you sure your view is not tinted by your hostility?"

"That's not it, you giant idiot!!" declared Aoi. "I'm just hopelessly stupid is all!"

That's why I had to have someone else give my answers for me this whole time! I want to rescue Horizon so I can confess to her, but I needed someone to tell me if I could do it! And if so, how! Having someone else tell me was the only way!"

And...

"Seijun is our representative! Our vice president! I had her figure out what exactly it was I wanted to do and she found the answer! There may be some downsides, but it isn't impossible! That was an answer I couldn't give! It was an answer our money-lover, author wannabe, and my sis couldn't give! So..." He took a breath. "I'll support Seijun! No matter what anyone else says about her or anything else, she gave me my answer! She was the only one who gave me my answer! Nothing else matters to me! And that's why I'll definitely – *definitely!* – support what she said! Nothing will change my mind!"

Aoi pointed forcefully at Innocentius's face.

"Compared to that, who do you think you are, old man? You've been making all sorts of complaints and saying all sorts of nice-sounding things, but it all comes down to wanting to kill Horizon! You haven't given me any answer other than that!"

"Mr. Impossible," said Innocentius while looking directly at Aoi. "Did you give any thought to what the people of Musashi and the Far East think about going to war?"

"Don't change the subject!!" shouted Aoi. "I haven't forgotten what Seijun said at the beginning! You're...um...what was it? Oh, right! You're trying to kill someone unrelated to the incident! And that's wrong!!"

"Do you understand why it is wrong?"

"I understood it back when she explained it!"

Masazumi heard the crowd muttering, "Is that really enough?"

It really isn't, she thought.

But...

"Don't worry, old man! Seijun still understands!"

...Is this idiot trusting me or forcing responsibility onto me?

She was not sure.

...But he's supporting me.

She understood one thing. She had felt she was only doing what she was supposed to.

...But he felt it had real meaning.

She now had a vague understanding of that irresponsible boy and his connection to the others. Until now, she had thought he was a hopeless person who could not do anything. She had not been entirely wrong about that.

...But that is exactly why he trusts people.

He would give absolute support toward anything she did.

He would fearlessly shout his support even when faced with the leader of the Catholics.

...Who else would do that?

As she silently asked that question, she heard him speak in front of her.

"Seijun, answer me this. This old man won't shut up about what we have to gain or lose, but will your plan cancel out all of the negatives once it's put together?"

"Y-yes. It will require a lot of cooperation, but the reservations can be supported with loans from Musashi."

"And what about that stuff about joining the countries ruling the reservations?"

"If we win, that will be taken care of. But my specialty is politics, so I can't say anything about the battles."

She received a response from the port side.

"I believe that will not be a problem!"

It was Mitotsudaira.

Masazumi turned around in surprise. Mitotsudaira had her arms crossed as

she stared sharply at Innocentius behind Masazumi.

Innocentius frowned.

“Oh, the heir of Mito Matsudaira. Are you supporting this rebellion against the Testament Union?”

“No. I am merely admonishing the Testament Union for going too far.”

She lowered her head slightly, but the strength in her gaze was the same when she looked back up.

“Even if this does develop into an all-out war with the Testament Union, we will not be fighting every nation at once. Musashi can move and use its stealth mode. We can choose our battlefields and we can move to areas not fully controlled by the Testament Union. Also...” She smiled. “The only enemies on the current battlefield are the declining Tres Españans and K.P.A. Italia who are acting as their bodyguards. The initial battle is not hopeless and, if we win here, some forces will likely recognize our value.”

“And do you understand what will happen if you do that, hm?” Innocentius slowly asked his question. “The Testament Union will no longer protect the reservations. What do you have to say about that?”

This was likely Innocentius’s final reminder and it brought a certain thought to Masazumi’s mind.

...This is it.

She made up her mind. She knew what she had to say to the Pope-Chancellor.

...That leads nicely into the final step of the countermeasure I thought up this morning.

She had finally arrived here.

...In that case...

Earlier, she might have hesitated to say it.

But now she had no reason to doubt herself.

She had someone who would support her. It may have only been one person in the entire world, but it was someone.

“Seijun, tell me.”

“What is it, you idiot?”

“Well, if we rescue Horizon, we gain stuff by avoiding foreign rule and gaining independence with that sovereignty thing.”

Masazumi listened to his question.

“But what do the other nations gain from us rescuing Horizon?”

“Aoi Toori.” She answered quietly, certainly, and directly. “Let me say one thing first. We will almost certainly have conflicts with the other nations; but we must never forget to wish, and do everything we can to ensure, that we do not die and that we do not let anyone else die. We must use politics, economics, religion, strategy, tactics, weaponry, negotiations, business deals, and anything else we can. We must never forget to do all of that in order avoid death and distribute the burden of responsibility among everyone.”

She faced forward toward the crowd gathered on the Musashi. She nodded once and then began speaking.

“No one will have to let Horizon die. That is the greatest gain that is common to the entire world. And it acts as the preparation for the other benefits and our justification.” She breathed cold air into her lungs. “By merging with Mikawa and rescuing Horizon Ariadust, Musashi can act as the sovereign power of the Far East.”

“Are you saying you will abandon the reservations? Is that it? Well?”

“No, we will not abandon the reservations.” She shook her head. “Musashi is now announcing that the Far Eastern reservations will temporarily become independent self-governed cities. They will be neutral areas where no distinction is made between religion and combat is forbidden. That frees the reservations from Musashi’s political decisions. To state it another way, the reservations are now free markets.”

She took a breath.

“And in exchange for recognizing the reservations’ independence and self-governance, Musashi will bind a contract to act as their voluntary guard ship. If

any battle is begun within a reservation or a reservation is being invaded, Musashi will strike back at the corresponding nation with an action deemed equal.”

And...

“With the reservations neutral, Musashi itself will act independently as the sovereign power of the Far East.”

“Why would you do that!? Why do you want to gain sovereignty and escape our rule!? What do we gain from this and what is your justification!?”

Masazumi boldly answered the Pope-Chancellor’s question.

“We will explain and resolve the Apocalypse by gathering the Logismoι Óplo.”

Masazumi clearly stated the final part of the conclusion she had reached that morning. This was their greatest justification against the Testament Union and everyone else.

“Musashi swears it will gather the Logismoι Óplo around Horizon Ariadust, work to resolve the Apocalypse, and seek no reward for doing so! This is a process that should be carried out on a worldwide scale; but we will prevent any nations from using it to their advantage and it will prevent intensified conflict between nations due to the gathering of the Logismoι Óplo!!”

In other words...

“We will act to save everyone from a worldwide crisis!”

“Nonsense!” roared Innocentius over the divine transmission. “You will possess weapons of mass destruction? Do you really think you have the right to do that!?”

“We do!” Masazumi spread her arms and opened her mouth wide to speak loudly. “The Logismoι Óplo are Horizon Ariadust’s stolen emotions, so they rightfully belong to her! They may currently exist as individual weapons of mass destruction, but do not forget that they are nothing but her expressions of emotion once they are in her possession!”

“...!?”

Innocentius tried to say something, but Masazumi ignored him.

“We request the return of the Logismoi Óplo which were created by stealing her emotions.”

She continued to speak while feeling relieved that she had reached the end.

“As Musashi Ariadust Academy’s representative, I will make an announcement here. Musashi does not wish for conflict with the other nations and we request assistance in resolving the Apocalypse! But if you obstruct our Apocalypse resolution, intensify the conflict over the Logismoi Óplo, or insist on holding on to a girl’s stolen emotions, Musashi will challenge you to a student-to-student confrontation as established in the academy rules!”

“I see,” said a voice over the broadcast.

The voice reached every nation in the world. It had an image in some places and it was filled with static in some places, but its meaning arrived all the same.

“Negotiations truly have broken down, haven’t they? These are no longer parallel views.”

The hard noise of snapping fingers was heard.

“Galileo, do it.”

Asama listened to Innocentius while supporting Suzu’s back.

...Do it? Do what?

Suddenly, Suzu trembled and turned her head to the left.

Asama reacted by moving Suzu to the right to protect her and looking to the left.

“Over there!!”

She shouted toward the port side. In that direction lay the schoolyard and a pool surrounded by a bamboo fence.

A large black body stood in front of it. A red demon wore a male K.P.A. Italia

uniform with a black cloak over it. He also wore glasses.

“I am Galileo, vice chancellor of K.P.A. Italia.”

An instant later, something moved.

It was Urquiaga whose blue and white shell was just as large as Galileo.

He instantly expanded the flight wings on his back and the accelerators under his arms. He spread his arms and lowered his body.

“Blast off!”

With those words, he began in a forward-leaning pose.

His face was turned directly toward the demon.

“Accursed heretic!!”

He pulled a giant pair of pliers from his pocket. It was divided into a left and right part and he held one in each hand while thrusting them forward.

He was a half-dragon. Specifically, he was a race produced by flying dragons that evolved into a humanoid form.

...His race can fly.

He initially gained speed by compressing the air within his body and expelling his Dragon Breath from the accelerators on various parts of his body. He would then use his forward motion to aid his air intake and provide even greater pressure to the Dragon Breath.

A dragon’s weapon was his mass and sturdy shell, but Urquiaga held a weapon in his hands.

“...!!”

He blew away a cloud of dust and accelerated.

The half-dragon Inquisitor skimmed across the ground as he flew.

His flight was instantaneous and he would reach his target in no time.

“Oh?” said Galileo in response, but he could not evade in time.

Urquiaga arrived.

But the expected sound of impact never came.

“...!?”

Urquiaga looked beyond the cloud of dust that swept in from behind him.

Beyond his arms were the combined pliers that looked like a giant pair of tongs. From what he had learned in his classes...

...This interrogation tool should not be used on humans because they will give in too quickly!

However, it was useful against those with shells because it could crack that tough outer shell. It was also useful for holding them in place. Standard practice was to use his momentum to capture the target within the tool and then twist it.

However...

“...”

The pliers would not budge when he tried to twist them.

He looked at the front of the pliers.

“A sickle!?”

“No. This is a *battaglia martello*.”

Beyond the cloud of dust, the demon held a black hammer in his left hand. It was meant for human use, but it was no different from a staff in the demon’s thick arm.

But oddly enough, Urquiaga’s pliers were not reaching the war hammer.

Just before reaching the rib-like design of the hammer, the two rectangular tips of the pliers were stopped in midair by some sort of power.

...No, wait! Has it lost its power!?

He poured all his strength into the grip, yet the tip of the pliers remained free and only opened and closed ever so slightly.

A meter was visible on the top of the war hammer. The meter was filled with

the color red and it was obviously producing some kind of spell effect.

“Do not tell me...”

“I see you have caught on.” Galileo nodded deeply and opened his fang-filled mouth. “This is Stithos Porneia, the Logismoí Óplo left with K.P.A. Italia. I am not its official user and am only borrowing it, but it will still show its power against an individual.”

He then explained its effect.

“At its current output, I suppose you could say it strips away all power that comes into contact with it and then plays with it.”

In an instant, the pliers came apart in Urquiaga’s hands. But they did not simply separate into the left and right portion. The grip, the latch on the bottom of the grip, and everything else came apart as well.

As the half-dragon gasped, Galileo laughed from deep in his throat.

“Anything that controls power gives up its power and is played with. Charming, isn’t it?”

That question was followed by a shout from Urquiaga. He ignored the demon before him as he raised his voice.

“Go!!”

An instant before Urquiaga’s cry, a figure leaped from behind him.

Urquiaga shouted the name of the one who roughly wore a male uniform without the upper inner suit and with a cloth wrapped around his stomach.

“Noriki!”

“You don’t have to call my name.”

Noriki ran toward Galileo’s right, the side not holding Stithos Porneia. His step rotated his body to swiftly bring his slender body to Galileo’s right side.

He lightly tapped the rough cloth wrapped around his right arm.

One of the charms inserted within the cloth reacted.

“Internal Connection: Suwa Shrine. Spell: Creation Registration 031: Confirmed.”

At the same time, a green torii-style spell emblem appeared from his right elbow to the tip of his fist.

“Created Spell ‘March’: Activate.”

With his right elbow bent down in a compact stance, he swung his body to the left.

“...!”

And he slammed his fist into Galileo’s side.

He poured all his strength into the blow. All of his weight was behind it.

A clear sound rang out.

“Oh? Is that all?”

As Galileo’s question would suggest, Noriki’s fist had struck the demon’s side and then stopped.

But it had not stopped due to Stithos Porneia’s power.

“You did not so much as shake my outer shell, much less break through. ... Your aim was good. A demon’s shell and scales are smaller on the side so we can twist our body. A strike to this more flexible spot can directly reach our organs.”

But...

“But it seems your fist was too light. Not only are you skinny, but you are weak and the multiple layers of scales and shell on my side dispersed the impact. It seems that spell strengthened the impact, but you used it against the K.P.A. Italia landing team commander last night, didn’t you? Did you forget how ineffectual it was there? I believe that was the same. Your fist is just too light.”

“You don’t have to say what I already know.”

“What teacher does not give a thorough explanation to a student? Then again, given your build, weight, and speed, you simply lack the strength needed to get through to my body. You would need about three times the strength you

have now.”

As Galileo spoke, Noriki moved away from him and prepared for another punch.

“Are you unable to learn?”

As soon as Galileo said that, Urquiaga let go of his pliers.

“I will be taking this back!”

His hands shot forward with the energy of a punch, but they were reaching for the hammer in the demon’s arm.

That Logismoí Óplo contained the emotion corresponding to the deadly sin of Porneia or lust. What would happen if he retrieved it?

Toori shouted over from the bridge.

“Uqui! Get it!! That’ll probably make Horizon all sexual!! I want it so bad!”

“Stop trying to talk me out of it!!”

But Galileo had already reacted. He ignored Noriki as the boy tried to punch him and he focused on Urquiaga’s actions. He raised three clawed fingers on his right hand.

“Geocentrism.”

That word was followed by a certain phenomenon.

Urquiaga and Noriki were suddenly slammed to the ground. And...

“!?”

The school yard was blown away in an arc with Galileo in the center.

Masazumi watched Galileo who stood in the schoolyard.

Only wind and dust surrounded him.

Urquiaga and Noriki who had stood to his front and right respectively now lay behind him.

They were both lying face down and seemed able to move, but they must

have taken damage.

“ ... ”

Neither one immediately stood up.

Not only had they been slammed to the ground, but they had been forcibly moved around the schoolyard. Their muscles had been strained and their organs and inner ears had been unable to keep up. They would be unable to stand for a while.

...But what was that?

As she thought, Galileo had already turned toward the others who were taking defensive stances.

She heard Innocentius's voice from the sky behind her where a sign frame was presumably displaying his face.

“C'mon, Galileo. Don't let them take it from you. I trusted you with that.”

“Are you not going to rebuke me for using a heretical spell?”

“Write a paper denying heliocentrism later. That will make up for it.”

“Then I will do what I can now.”

As he spoke, Galileo looked up.

He looked across everyone on the port side and suddenly stopped his gaze on Ohiroshiki who was a bit port of the center.

“Yes. You will do.”

“Ehhhh!? This just isn't my lucky day, is it!? Everyone, everyone! Help me! Please help me!! ...Ah, why are you all moving away!? Stop it!”

“Ah ha ha. Ga-chan, don't you think we should watch someone else get slammed to better grasp the situation?”

“That's right, Margot. Make sure to watch carefully. The slow and short one dying first is the standard pattern with these things. And if it follows the pattern, it means everything is staying within our expectations!!”

“You people are horrible!”

Hearing Ohiroshiki's shout of protest, Masazumi wondered if everyone was sure of their victory or if they were just naturally like this.

But then Noriki began to move. Without brushing off the dirt, he forced himself to his feet, held up the emblem on his arm, and tried to punch Galileo.

But Galileo held up his palm and spoke something.

"...!?"

Suddenly, Galileo stood behind the others. It had all happened in an instant.

"A movement technique!?"

It was not a teleportation technique. The wind and dust surrounding him and trailing after his path were proof enough of that.

But his position was dangerous. He stood below the bridge and a demon's strength put him only a jump away.

"Now then."

He made the jump. The muscles of his massive body allowed him to lightly hop onto the railing of the bridge.

"I finally made it. Hm. This is my first time seeing Musashi's representative up close."

The demon shrugged as he looked down on Masazumi from a distance of five meters. He was over three meters tall and standing on the railing, so it felt like he was directly in front of her.

He then held out his right hand.

"That discussion was quite amusing. ...But class is now over."

Everyone down below took action, but Masazumi could tell they were not going to make it in time.

She was up high. Naruze and Naito could fly up to her, but it took time for their wings to take in air and pressurize it.

Tenzou the ninja could likely jump up to them, but he was on the port side of the schoolyard because he had tried to follow up Urquiaga and Noriki's attacks.

That meant no one was going to make it in time. The technique that defeated Noriki and Urquiaga would strike her.

...I need to escape!

Just as she thought that, Galileo started to swing his right arm.

At that moment, she felt two things.

First, Aoi grabbed her body from the side as if tackling her.

“C’mon, that’s dangerous!”

And he pushed her to the ground.

“...!?”

Second, she felt a wind.

The wind blew up from the bottom of the stairs and washed over her.

“...!?”

Just as she wondered what was happening, a white light raced by.

As Masazumi lay on top of the bridge leading to the academy, she saw a certain sight.

The butt end of a spear had struck the right arm of the black-cloaked demon standing on the bridge railing.

The wind that had flown into the area was actually a spear-wielding girl with her black hair tied in a ponytail.

“I am Honda Futayo, commander of the Far East’s Guard Unit,” she said.

That name caused Masazumi to move from where she lay on the bridge. Aoi lay on top of her to protect her, but she frantically tried to knock him away.

“Futayo!? ...Aoi! Don’t! Touch! Me!!”

“I’m on top of you, so stop asking the impossible.”

“Get off of me!!”

She kicked him off, moved away from him, and stood up as the idiot rolled

away.

She looked toward the back of the female warrior standing between her and the demon.

“Is that you, Futayo!?”

“Masazumi. ...I have not seen you since middle school.”

But Futayo did not turn toward her. As she wondered why, she heard Galileo speak from beyond Futayo.

“Are you trying to interfere?”

“Which one of us is doing the interfering?”

No one on the bridge or the schoolyard answered those questions. The response came from the people of Musashi gathered below the stairs in front of the school. Masazumi heard voices coming from far below the stairs behind her.

The surprised voices changed to cheers.

“...!”

As she turned toward the commotion, she saw Aoi was already looking down the stairs.

Wondering what was causing these voices, she followed his gaze and saw two people climbing the stairs.

And Aoi called out to them.

“Hey, hey! Is that We and We’s wife!? Are you two on a walk!?”

“Show some respect! We are Musashi King Yoshinao!”

Yoshinao had already passed by the film crew standing on the stairs. His wife accompanied him while dressed as a queen of the era would dress.

“We hope all of you have not forgotten that we still hold the authority of the Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council!”

“Oh. You took our authority and tried to attract everyone’s attention, but we completely forgot about you so now you’re taking center stage yourself? I understand. You’re something like an unpopular performer.”

“How dare you speak that way towards us!? How dare you!?”

“Okay, okay, okay.” Masazumi stepped in between Yoshinao and Aoi. “Calm down, calm down. Um, Musashi King, what do you need?”

“We are here to admonish you students for your reckless actions, Honda-kun!”

Oh, he knows who I am, she realized.

The Far East’s Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council swapped out every year, so it was not uncommon for people to remember faces but not names.

Meanwhile, Yoshinao arrived at the top of the stairs while holding his wife’s hand.

“Papa-Schola. If you can hear us, then please have Galileo leave.”

“Oh? And what are you going to do? The Musashi King holds the right to veto the decisions made by the Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council, but you cannot take part in a student dispute as you are not a student.”

Yoshinao spoke with his back to the film crew.

“We have the Guard Unit commander who is acting as our bodyguard.”

...I see.

Masazumi turned toward Futayo’s back. She had not moved, but Galileo had lowered his arm and taken a step back.

And then Yoshinao continued speaking.

“This is Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter and she was personally trained by him. She is armed with the divine weapon Tonbokiri which was a prototype for the Logismoí Óplo. We shall see if any of the students here can defeat such a great warrior.”

“And will you return their authority if she loses? Musashi King, what proof do you have that this girl warrior is not in league with Musashi’s students? Well?”

“Wait a second, old man! Don’t treat us like these cosplay people!”

Masazumi kicked him away.

The idiot rotated thrice, struck the railing, and broke through it.

She looked slightly surprised at this unexpectedly over-the-top result.

“I feel like I should ask... Are you okay?”

“Eh? Y-yeah, don’t worry about it. That was due to my boke spell, so I’m perfectly fine!”

Really? she wondered, but she could see there was not even a scratch on him.

She felt constant protection would be more convenient than a spell using charms, but she also felt she would catch his idiocy if she delved too deeply into it.

“In other words, King Yoshinao, you want Futayo to fight one of us?”

She felt that was absurd. She knew how strong Futayo was from her time in Mikawa.

They had not been together in middle school, but they had often been compared due to the identical family name.

Masazumi had failed to inherit a historical name, but it was said Futayo would certainly continue in Lord Tadakatsu’s footsteps.

Tadakatsu may have died, but Futayo had received Tonbokiri.

But...

“My special movement technique was unable to keep up with Tres España’s Tachibana Muneshige.”

“ ... ”

Masazumi saw the guard unit gathered by the school building’s entrance. They were looking at Futayo worriedly, but they said nothing.

They must have been unable to stand having Futayo as an enemy.

And another person walked forward from behind them. It was Oriotorai.

“Things sure have gotten complicated while I just watched on.” She clapped her hands. “The debate between Masazumi and Aoi was interrupted by the Pope-Chancellor, but I say they’ve both shown equally solid standpoints. That’s

fine, right?”

She then turned toward the Broadcast Committee’s film crew to face the Pope-Chancellor.

“This is an internal issue of Musashi Ariadust Academy, so I must ask for students from other academies to stay out of it.”

“I will be more careful in the future.”

“Judge.” Oriotorai nodded. “Now, time for an extra round. How about we get the fourth round started?”

She turned toward Futayo and nodded. Futayo nodded back and took a breath.

“If you cannot defeat me, know that your blades will never reach the enemy. If you cannot do that...”

She turned toward Masazumi. Behind her, Galileo also glanced toward Masazumi for an instant.

“...!”

Wind wrapped around him and he vanished.

Next, the afternoon wind blew in. It shook Futayo’s hair. That hair blew against Tonbokiri’s blade and was cut.

“If you cannot do that, I will cut through all of your hopes and dreams.”

Now...

“Who will be my opponent!?”

Chapter 33: The Summit's Flower

CHAPTER 33

"The Summit's Flower"



Why
Do suggestive flowers
Blossom despite being isolated?
Point Allocation (Reliability)

Why

Do suggestive flowers

Blossom despite being isolated?

Point Allocation (Reliability)

Futayo's call for an opponent caused everyone on the port side to exchange glances.

Urquiaga and Noriki were getting up after the attack from Galileo's spell, but fighting Honda Tadakatsu's daughter while injured was a heavy burden.

They all slowly gathered, formed a circle, and began to whisper.

"How about I head out as a knight? Just leave it to me and – wham! – she'll be done for."

"Hm. Or I could drop Jizuri Suzaku from the sky as a surprise attack and – crash! – that would settle that."

"No, I should use my bow from a distance and – boom! – problem solved."

"...Why do the girls around here like onomatopoeia so much?" complained Tenzou.

"A dispute among the students like before was fine, but I'm not sure the Mitotsudaira family would support you if you opposed the King of Musashi," said Neshinbara. "Also, I doubt a surprise attack would work on her and Asama-kun can't oppose the King of Musashi as the daughter of the Asama Shrine."

"Then we have no choice but to send me!" declared Nenji.

"As a German, I'll put this realistically," said Naito. "I think that would end with her stepping on you and splattering you everywhere."

"Margot and I take a moment to use our spells and her cutting would reach us in the sky."

Everyone exchanged another glance. For an instant, their gazes gathered on Persona-kun, but he frantically shook his helmet. No one even considered Itoken or Hassan.

Finally, Neshinbara sighed and spoke.

“I guess that leaves me. I can use substitution spells like Bertoni-kun did earlier.”

“I would be a better choice than you,” said Tenzou quietly. “She is a samurai which is a poor match for a ninja like me, but I can try.”

As he spoke, Toori peered down at them from the bridge.

“No, no. Tenzou can’t do it! That’s hopeless.”

“Y-you don’t have to pour cold water on my motivation, you know!”

“What!? But think about how she speaks. She speaks in a super old-fashioned way while you half-ass it. You lose from character density perspective before the fight even starts.”

Tenzou lowered his head for a bit.

As Futayo watched, she called out from over the railing.

“Do you need something with me? Does that ninja want something?”

“Tenzou, do you think you can speak like her without trying?”

The ninja hung his head, fell to his hands and knees, and repeatedly slammed his right fist against the schoolyard.

“D-dammit! I-I just can’t do it that seriously!!”

As everyone commented on how he took it pretty far as well, someone suddenly raised their head.

“Heh heh heh. The pathetic ninja, the pious half-dragon, the unsociable fighter, and all these overly-offensive girls are simply hopeless.”

It was Kimi. She raised her eyebrows and let out a laugh.

“Listen, all you foolish people. Simply sit there drinking tea. Foolish brother, your wise sister will save you and all your lacking companions. Flat-chested politician, come down from there. It is dangerous.”

As she spoke, Kimi left the group and walked toward the stairs up to the bridge.

On the bridge, Masazumi looked down at her with a confused look, but Toori spoke up.

“Oh, sis gets scary if you don’t do what she says, so you should probably go down.”

“A-are you sure this is okay?”

“Yeah. Oh, but based on what she said, I think she quite likes you, Seijun. You don’t have to be scared.”

Really? she wondered as she descended the stairs.

Kimi was unarmed as she climbed the stairs in her place. As she walked, she removed the neck of her uniform’s inner suit, the white inner collar connected to the hard points, and the uniform’s chest.

“These are in the way.”

With the chest opened up, her breasts were only supported by the sash-like black part. She also removed the shoulders of the jacket, removed the vest-like jacket, and left only the sleeves wrapped around her arms.

She was now lighter. Her skin was exposed, but she had a smile on her lips as she finished climbing the stairs.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, you can start thanking me now. You will be thanking me again afterwards as well.”

“Sis, you’re always amazing with that sort of thing! Have you gone a little insane!?”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, just admit you cannot keep up with your sister. Of course, there is no way you can keep up with your excellent sister who was born so much earlier than you.”

“C’mon, sis. You can’t brag about being born earlier. Come to think of it, you might’ve been born due to an accident on dad and mom’s part. On the other hand, I was born later, so I was born due to a planned effort on their part.”

“Heh heh heh. You scum.”

Masazumi listened to their smiling exchange as she joined the others down

below.

“Are those two okay?”

“Oh, yes. Kimi and Toori-kun have always been like this. You could say this is how they interact.”

“But if you ask me, I think Kimi-chan is at her best here.”

“Heh heh heh. The people down below are talking about us, foolish brother.”

“C’mon, sis. A lot of the people down there are my friends, so don’t get them mixed up.”

“True.”

As they spoke, something happened atop the bridge.

Futayo slowly got down from the railing while Toori and the Yoshinao couple headed for the stairs.

That left two. Kimi and Futayo faced each other at a distance of five meters.

As the two faced each other, Yoshinao heard his wife’s voice as he reached the edge of the stairs.

“Honey.”

Her words reached his heart as the ends of her eyebrows lowered and she pulled on his sleeve.

He knew what she wanted to say. He should stop this.

On one side was a warrior. On the other...

...Is a strange girl.

That was the older sister of Toori Aoi who walked next to him. He had heard her speak, but he was not sure what she meant. However, he was fairly certain she was human.

A warrior against a strange girl.

The latter could not win. And if she could not win, she could only lose.

And losing against a warrior would most likely mean receiving some form of injury. That was why his wife wanted to stop it. He felt his wife was a kind person. That satisfied him and he decided to take her out to eat some time soon.

“Hey, We, We! Why are you staring off into space? Does your brain work differently or something?”

“Only we may call us We!” shouted Yoshinao. “Are you not going to stop her!? She is your sister!”

“It’s fine. Anyway, I have a question.”

Yoshinao listened to the boy’s carefree voice.

“If my sis wins, will you give me the position of king?”

“ ...”

What nonsense is this? he wondered. *The position of king is given on the instructions of the Testament Union.*

However...

“We, you took our authority, so you can do the same thing in reverse. Also... If Horizon does return, she’ll be the ruler of Musashi, Mikawa, and the Far East as a whole, so you’ll be in conflict, right? And...”

“And?” asked Yoshinao wondering where Toori was going with this.

...This boy can do nothing and everything he does is foolish. But...

For some reason, he was beginning to move Musashi, the entire Far East, and maybe even more than that. His motive was simple. He simply wished to rescue and confess to the girl he had fallen for, but people had begun to take action toward that end.

Yoshinao had heard what this foolish boy had said to the Papa-Schola.

...He wanted his answer.

This got Yoshinao thinking.

He had once ruled a small territory on the national border and had intended to protect the people there.

But the Testament Union had told him to become the King of Musashi.

...If we had refused, our territory would have been destroyed.

And so he had obeyed, given his territory to the Testament Union, and avoided conflict.

But the major town of his territory had been destroyed by a highway between nations and the remaining villages had been absorbed by an industrial city. The people began living in the city and had supposedly gained a wealthier life.

He wondered if they were happier now, but those who had insisted on remaining in their simple land had lost everything.

And so he asked Toori another question. He asked a question to this idiot who had rejected the loss of what he cared for and was struggling despite having no power.

“Why do you wish to be king?”

“Because I want to take back all that Horizon lost because of me,” answered Toori. “Don’t worry. Even if I become king, I won’t use the royal we. That can still be your thing. It’s better that way. ...Because I can still make jokes.”

“That is not the issue!!”

Yoshinao shouted, but he sighed inwardly.

...What is he trying to do?

There was no way his sister could win the battle beginning before their eyes.

As he looked up, Futayo took a slow step forward.

“Now then.”

She approached in order to begin the battle.

Futayo looked at the girl standing before her.

Her wavy hair was dyed light brown and she had a confident smile on her face. Her name was Kimi and she was supposedly the elder sister of Musashi’s chancellor.

The sleeves wrapped around her arms and the exposed top of her breasts led Futayo to a certain conclusion.

“Are you a shirabyoushi?”

“Heh heh heh. Such a boring girl with no knowledge of art. This is much older than that. Are you truly that ignorant?”

“Unfortunately, I have no interest in the arts.”

“Heh heh. You will waste your life. How very boring. ...Uzy, come on out.”

Once its name was called, a super-deformed girl-type Mouse appeared on her shoulder. The Mouse wore a mask pushed back above her head.

“This is the Mouse of Uzume, the primary god of the arts. My main shrine is Ootsubaki Shrine in Mikawa, but my contract is held via Asama. ...Do you understand how Uzume-type gods work?”

“Not in detail. I only know it involves conveying emotions by causing commotions and laughter.”

“Is that so? Then I shall teach you.”

Kimi began slowly shaking her body along with Uzy on her shoulder.

This was the beginning of a dance. Futayo took a defensive stance while thinking Kimi was going to try something.

“Let me make myself clear: if you surrender, I will not treat you roughly.”

“Heh heh. What a fool. A girl who says she does not want to be treated roughly is a girl who has never even been treated mildly. Or do you think lenient treatment will delight your partner?” Kimi shook her body in the opposite direction, returned in the first direction, and smiled. “Even if you are able to delight your partner, you could never win them over. You have never seriously faced someone, have you?”

Hearing that, Futayo gulped.

...Well...

That morning, she had challenged Tachibana Muneshige in speed. She remembered how that had overturned everything, including her standpoint.

She felt that was the best she could have done in that situation, but...

“ ...”

She slowly shook her head and drove the memories from her mind.

...There is no reason to let her shake me.

She had to calm down. Her opponent did not appear to have trained her body for combat. Nor did she wield a weapon. She had produced a Mouse, so she would likely use a spell or divine protection. It was possible she had already used them.

However, the girl's hands were covered by her sleeves. She could not operate a sign frame like that. She could still use spells by communicating with her Mouse, but that added more time to activate a spell.

In that case, it had to be divine protection. She would have a divine protection spell from an Uzume-type entertainment god.

...It will not be combat oriented.

There were different categories of gods because their abilities were also divided. If two gods were close in type, their spells and protections would be similar or even identical, but an entertainment god was simply too far removed from the combat category.

“Oh, just so you know, all of my contracts are related to eroticism and dancing.”

...She really has no combat abilities!!

In that case, she would use substitution intermediation.

By dedicating a dance, she could gain the power of another god via the Uzume shrine.

In that case, thought Futayo. I need to be on my guard.

And once she put up her guard, she thought. If her attack hit, she would defeat her opponent. That opponent's movements were slow, so she could grab her if she tried.

...That leaves countless means of winning.

She would not even need to use the cutting power which was Tonbokiri's true essence as a divine weapon. She could easily cut this girl with the actual blade. Or she could jab her with the butt of the spear. She could also sweep her legs out from under her, grab onto her arms and throw her, or pull her to the ground with her hair which was carelessly waving around.

Almost anything would work.

But that was why she decided to use speed.

That technique had not worked on Tachibana Muneshige that morning, but she wanted to check it again. She felt it was immature to use it on an opponent who was so far below her level, but the opponent was irrelevant when it came to testing her own ability.

And so Futayo lowered her stance, held up Tonbokiri, and faced Kimi as the girl swayed.

"Prepare yourself!"

And she took a step forward.

Futayo used the handle.

Tonbokiri was normally 3.6 meters long plus a 40 centimeter blade, but it could vary between six meters and one meter using its ability to extend and contract.

It was currently approximately 2.7 meters and she found that length easiest to use.

Simply holding the center of the handle was enough to give her a blunt weapon over a meter long on both the right and left. If she passed by her opponent with a movement spell, it would be no different from hitting her with a metal rod.

Futayo moved. She travelled forward to pass by Kimi on the left as the girl continued to sway.

She swung the handle at ankle height. She had thought about going for the abdomen, but the cost would be too great in the off chance that her opponent

truly had nothing at all prepared. A high speed strike to the gut of an untrained person could easily break bones or rupture organs.

The ankle could still break bones, but the odds were higher the girl would merely trip. Her balance was unsteady due to her swaying, so she would trip if Futayo scooped upwards as she hit.

An untrained body was easily damaged. After the fall and the pain in her ankles prevented her from walking, Kimi would likely surrender.

And so Futayo carried out her plan.

She ran forward with her divine protection. She lowered her body and swung the handle down.

“...!”

And she swept it across to take out her opponent’s ankles.

Yoshinao saw Futayo suddenly appear before his eyes.

She had of course travelled there, but it had looked like she had instantly teleported. The motion of the wind and the waving of Futayo’s clothes and hair allowed him to just barely guess the direction of her motion.

...She is fast.

But that thought made him recall a certain fact.

...But there was someone she could not catch up to with that speed.

In that case, Musashi’s students had to be stronger than Futayo at the least.

But even if they could demonstrate that strength...

...It does not mean they can overcome the one who defeated her.

As he thought, Futayo adjusted her lowered stance, spun Tonbokiri around, and held it normally once more.

“It is over.”

Yoshinao looked back toward where Kimi had stood.

There, he saw Kimi standing casually and swaying with her arms crossed.

...What?

Kimi stood there.

She was unharmed. She did not have a scratch on her.

...What just happened?

As he gasped, his wife tugged on his left sleeve with her eyes wide.

Futayo noticed how the two of them were acting.

“What is the matter?”

As she asked that, she followed their gazes and looked behind her.

In front of Yoshinao, his wife, and Futayo’s gazes, Kimi stood with a smile on her face.

She was simply swaying lightly as if nothing had happened. She swayed with the tempo of a dance step.

After a moment, Futayo nodded. After another pause, she nodded again and then a third time.

“I never thought reality would lie to me.”

“Heh heh heh. Try not to take so long to reach such a simple conclusion. ... Foolish brother, how would you react in this situation? Give her an example!”

Next to the railing, Yoshinao, his wife, and Futayo all turned in the direction of Kimi’s gaze. There, they saw Toori peering into a bucket and muttering to himself.

He sat down, occasionally laughed toward the bucket, and lightly stroked its wooden surface.

“Heh. Hah hah. Wa ha ha. You’re so cute. So very cute. Heh heh heh. You’re soaking wet.”

“...Has he gone beyond cross-species romance and reached inanimate object romance? You have quite an advanced younger brother.”

“Heh heh heh. He has done surprisingly well for my brother. Skipping past the middle steps makes for an excellent visual. I will knock him into the sewage

later. ...Now, Honda Futayo. You are currently the least interesting girl in the entire Far East.” Kimi raised her eyebrows and smiled. “You are just as hopeless as I thought. ...You are making the idea of speed cry.”

In that instant, Futayo vanished from Yoshinao’s vision.

Futayo made her second attack.

She charged to the left and swung the spear as she passed by. She pulled in her shoulder and raised her bent elbow like a crank to scoop up her opponent’s legs.

And she hit.

She felt the blow connect. She used her entire body to brake and stopped after travelling seven meters. While almost sliding forward, she lowered her upper body and turned around so as not to turn her back to the enemy.

With the butt end of Tonbokiri turned toward her opponent, she raised her upper body to look.

“Heh heh. What are you doing? Is that supposed to be fast? Or painful? Or simply...meaningless?”

Despite supposedly having been hit, Kimi faced her with a smile.

...*What?*

“What sort of spell is this?”

“Who would be foolish enough to ask? And who would be foolish enough to answer? ...But I am willing to brag about it.”

While taking swaying steps, Kimi stretched her right arm directly out to the side. While lightly spinning, Uzy travelled along the arm and then back. The Mouse rotated atop her breasts and then travelled along her extended left arm.

With the Mouse’s movements decorating her, Kimi spoke.

“Didn’t I tell you? My contract is related to eroticism and dance. But do you think being erotic means you will give your body to just anyone?”

With the Mouse named Uzy on the end of her left sleeve, Kimi slowly held the

arm forward. She held her right arm forward as well and Uzy hopped to her right hand.

“The summit’s flower is only seen by those who reach that summit. And it cannot be brought down without it withering. And thus the summit’s flower continues to bloom in isolation. As long as that mountain remains inviolable, it can only be collectively worshipped by those who have reached that elevated place.”

Kimi laughed from her throat.

She then rotated her arms behind her and let Uzy hop to her left arm.

“My Summit Dance is a spell that does not allow anything inelegant to touch my body. It ensures that the flower cannot be picked by a fool who does not realize it will wither. Only someone I approve of, someone who I wish to wither for, can touch me.”

Futayo carried out her third attack, but Kimi’s voice continued as soon as she had dashed and swung her spear.

“How inelegant. Flowers are meant to be picked, not reaped.”

Futayo turned toward the voice behind her.

She saw a smile amid the waving hair and swaying body.

“Do not think I have no means of attack. Even beautiful flowers have thorns or poisonous roots. Let your guard down and I will slap you. And I will not stop until you are completely paralyzed,” said her opponent. “Now, show me whether you can reach this summit or not. As long as I continue dedicating this dance, I stand at the summit.”

And she moved. She swayed, stretched her gently moving body, raised her arms, tossed Uzy into the air, and opened her mouth.

“———!”

With a smile, she let out a voice. It was a type of tuning that seemed to call in something.

Uzy performed mid-air acrobatics and Kimi swayed as the Mouse began to fall. But this was not the gentle swaying from before. She made clear steps.

She moved up and down, her hair, clothes, and body waved about, and her sleeves audibly struck the air.

And something else joined that noise.

“Let...me...pass.”

Uzy fell to her shoulder, but her body swayed once more.

“Let me...pass.”

Her voice was higher and more drawn-out than before.

“Let me pass.”

Her words passed through the air.

Futayo recognized the words. This was a children’s song known as the Song of Passage. It was sung as a lullaby, an accompaniment to some games, and...

...For dance!

Not good, thought Futayo. *What should I do?*

“Let me pass.”

Her words were picking up pace. This was not the normal tempo for the song. It was a quick four-on-the-floor arrangement meant for dancing. As the tempo rose and the dance picked up speed, the density of the dance rose dynamically.

...And its value as a dedication rises!

The summit’s flower was attempting to blossom in an even higher place.

And Futayo had yet to reach the current summit. The fact that her attacks could not reach Kimi proved that.

But she knew one solution.

...Her spell is not perfect.

If her opponent was raising her dedication value by speeding up and singing, Futayo could reach her by dedicating an action that exceeded that level.

Tonbokiri’s cutting power would accomplish it in one shot. The weapon had been created as a military prototype. The amount of ether power consumed when activating it was greater than the amount of ether used for a personal

spell.

But, thought Futayo. I do not want to use that if I can avoid it.

Her opponent was the same age. If that opponent was dancing, she would use speed. She wanted to outdo this opponent with speed and leave Tonbokiri as a last resort.

“...”

She stood up and took a step in preparation for that.

As her opponent sang and gently built up speed, she built up her own speed with a step that used her movement spell.

“Let me pass.”

And she moved forward to gain passage.

A sound rang out.

The wind blew and shadows danced.

A black and white dance blossomed in the center and a wind repeatedly rushed through the surroundings.

In the wind, only human shadows and a silver arc were visible. The wind did not hesitate to use its blade.

The shaking of the bridge and the stepping of feet created a reverberation, hair whipping in the wind created a rustling, and clothes flapping about creating a beat in the air.

“Let me pass.”

She sang with a smile in her voice.

“If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?”

The surrounding noises provided accompaniment.

“This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven.”

But the noises attempted to drown out the voice.

“Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here.”

Again and again, the noises rang out.

“I have come to celebrate this child’s tenth birthday.”

Black and white clothing danced in the center.

“By dedicating these two talismans.”

The surrounding air enveloped her.

“Going may be easy, but returning is frightening.”

The schoolyard’s trees and the school building’s windows produced noise.

“Can I pass despite my fear?”

However...

“Let me pass.”

She began the second loop.

She did not stop, she did not cease, and she did not pause. Her speed only grew.

“...!!”

The sounds and her movements overlapped.

The speed grew. As if the noise had grown, the wind blew again and again.

“Hey... Look at that,” said the people watching.

The looked within the wind noisily surrounding the dance.

“I can see shadows now...”

As several people made similar dumbfounded comments, many different human figures began to appear within the wind.

High-speed movement and attacks repeated again and again. The movement could not be seen, but that movement stopped slightly in the instant of attack. Repeating this so many times produced a visible afterimage of the wind’s form.

Honda Futayo could be seen around the dancing black and white flower as

she attempted to gain passage for her spear.

The location of her attacks changed based on the movements of the dance, so she did not appear in just one location. She became visible in two, three, four, and then suddenly seven and eight locations.

“Wait a second...”

Once it surpassed twelve, the afterimages became impossible to count as they began to appear behind and mix together with other afterimages.

But she could still not catch up. The dance was quick, accurate, singing, and noisy.

“She’s smiling...”

The flower danced while ignoring the blade that should have stabbed into her countless times. The people then noticed that the type of dance was changing.

“She’s dancing with her opponent.”

She was using Futayo’s movements as a part of the dance. Having seen through the movements of the girl’s arms, legs, and body, she would draw back when the girl moved forward and pursue when the girl moved back.

It was as if she had taken the girl’s hand.

And the dance changed to match. As she matched the dance to the attacks, it sped up even further.

“She’s swallowing her up.”

Kimi included Futayo’s attacks in her dance and raised the dedication level. The more Futayo raised her speed, the higher the summit of the flower that devoured that speed.

And so the sound of the wind grew. Sweat flew, the wind burst, and...

“Oh!”

That voice was accompanied by an action. This was Futayo’s cry as she attacked.

“Ohhhh!”

Her speed added power to the strike and flowers scattered.

Those flowers were white sparks. Both of their powers were strengthened by a spell. The ether protecting them collided and produced those glowing flowers.

Futayo was catching up. As she tried to take the lead in the dance, those white flowers flew amid a great noise.

“Ohhhhhh!”

Her tearing shout produced color.

That color was red. As Kimi danced, several scarlet lines raced across her skin.

The wind was reaching her. The wind’s blade attempted to forcefully pick the flower.

“...”

Beads of blood joined the flowing sweat on the dancing flower’s skin and it drew lines as it dripped down.

But the flower did not end its dance.

Even as the summit’s wind raged about, the flower continued looking higher.

The song entered a new loop.

As wind blew through the port side and the noise shook the ground, Masazumi asked the others a question.

“Is she okay!?”

She felt the situation had gone beyond a battle between allies and reached a deadly state.

...If Aoi’s sister’s defenses are broken...

Futayo would likely stab straight through her.

She felt a bad feeling in the bottom of her gut.

“She will be fine,” said Asama as she held Suzu from behind.

Masazumi turned toward her and saw Asama’s eyebrows raised as she looked

up at the bridge. Her expression belied her words, so it seemed she had been speaking to reassure herself.

“She will be fine. Everyone believes she will, so you believe in her too, Masazumi.”

“But...”

“Kimi will not lose.”

The instant Asama said that, she closed her right eye. Masazumi looked over at the girl’s right cheek.

“Blood...”

It had reached her after being scattered by the wind. It was not much, but the color was clearly there.

However...

“She will be fine,” said Asama without wiping away the blood. “As I am sure you all know, Kimi has only ever cried once.”

“When? And to who?”

While looking up at the wind on the bridge, Asama gave the answer.

“A long time ago and to Toori-kun. ...That was the only time.”

So...

“As long as Toori-kun is watching, she will not lose.”

As Kimi sang and danced within the wind, she thought.

...This is wonderful. Great!

This was a good opponent. Not many people in Musashi could reach this speed.

Such a wonderful opponent, she thought. If it was a boy, there would be a sensual side too, but with a girl it is...um... What do you call it? Let’s see... Oh, well. I forget. But that is fine. I make the rules after all.

...But this is truly wonderful.

Her opponent was keeping up, so she brought her dance to the next level.

But her opponent kept up with that as well. She forcibly kept up as if clinging to Kimi.

...This is fun.

She did not feel she was being forced higher. After all, a girl was supposed to run away and have her opponent chase after her. There was beauty in running away so she could not be caught.

At the moment, she was moving.

Her sweat flowed, her hair shook, and her heat leaked from her skin. All sounds seemed like the beating of her heart.

She felt as if speaking out would expose her passion, will, beating heart, and everything else to the outside world.

It felt wonderful.

Her movements reached their peak, she demonstrated her will as much as possible, and the beating of her heart grew to the extreme.

“———!”

And she exposed it all. All of her was defenseless. This was not something she could do often.

But, she thought. This is not enough.

There was a time long ago when she had cried with everything she had.

...Even this dance is nowhere close to that.

There had been a few times when she had tried to reach that point again, but she had never been able to reach that truly defenseless state a second time. No matter how far she took the dance, she could not catch up to that instant in the past.

She recalled what she had been exposing back then.

She recalled the past.

...That was...

She thought about what had once happened.

...That was a few months after Horizon passed away.

She remembered.

“It seems Toori-kun received a serious injury on his left shoulder in the accident that took Horizon from us. While still unconscious, he was taken to Mikawa with Horizon and he was still sleeping when he was returned. But he was alone then.”

Below the great noise and crying wind, Masazumi listened to Asama.

“For a while, he stopped attending the academy. He stayed in his home for several months and it seems he never said anything.”

“Aoi did?”

“Yes. Toward the end, he stopped eating and lost a lot of weight. At the time, his and Kimi’s parents were away and no one could contact them. When we came to see him, he would refuse to come out, so we wondered what was going to happen.”

Asama’s words spilled from her mouth.

“But it was Kimi who woke him up.”

That day was no different from any other day, thought Kimi as she moved.

Their parents had been gone, so she had been living alone with her brother who could not move his left arm very well.

She had been able to stay up late without anyone getting mad at her and she had been able to eat whatever she wanted as long as she stayed within the budget.

But her brother had been in a bad state. He would not speak, he would rarely change his clothes, he had stopped cleaning his room, and his expression would never change, but he had said something just once.

“What would happen if I died?”

She had not been able to say it was unexpected. At the time, she had thought about it too. She had understood that her brother thought it was his fault that Horizon had died.

And so she had answered while doing the best a child could to feign calm.

“Stop that.”

And he had obeyed. He had not done anything to try to kill himself.

...But he stopped eating.

He would come down to the table at mealtimes, but he would only sit in his chair and do nothing. He would hang his head and stare through his unkempt bangs at the table as if he could see straight through it.

Eventually, he had stopped coming when she called him down for meals.

She would tell herself he must have already eaten, eat her own meal, and then return to her room.

...Did I do that because I was afraid?

She did not know.

But even though her brother had not been eating or drinking anything, she had heard him vomiting in the bathroom late at night. And not because he had been feeling sick or had eaten something funny.

...He would stick his hand in his throat.

She had been able to tell he was attempting to vomit up his entire being because she could hear the small whistling of his breathing while obstructed by his hand.

She had tried to cover her ears, but it had not worked. After all, she could still vividly recall the noise even now.

The time he had spent motionless had increased.

He had done what she said. When she had brought food or hot water to his room, he would eat or drink a little while she was there. But he would not even touch it once she left and he would vomit it up later.

Their classmates at the academy had been concerned at first, but they had

eventually stopped mentioning the real issue.

No one could reach their parents. Whenever he would pass by the house, Asama's father had provided support by giving her health and healing charms. He had tried to make it look casual, but it was obvious that was an act.

She had been able to withstand it due to the understanding and support of those in the neighborhood.

But the deciding factor had come one morning when she had woken up.

Her brother had been collapsed in the hallway.

When she had tried to waken him, she had been shocked to find how light he was. It had felt like she was holding something that was hollow inside.

The dining room had been closer than the bed, so she had set him in his chair and prepared a light meal.

She still remembered what she had thought back then.

...This can't keep on like this.

"Eat this," she had said after placing chilled rice porridge and hot water in front of Toori.

But he had been different from normal then.

He had not listened to her and he had not even taken a bite.

Thinking back, she felt she had vaguely understood what she had been doing, but it had not occurred to her at the time.

"What is it?"

He had not responded no matter how many times she had spoken to him, so she had grabbed the collar of his pajamas in faint anger.

In that moment, she had heard her brother speak toward the floor.

"Horizon can't feel anything anymore."

Asama took a breath and looked up at the wind wrapping around the bridge and the flower at the center of the dance.

“It was amazing. On that day, I had reluctantly gone to meet Kimi and Toori-kun because my father told me to. I was supposed to ask them to come to the academy with me. When I approached, the window shattered and something rolled into the street. To my surprise, it was Toori-kun.”

And...

“A moment later, Kimi jumped out the window as well and held Toori-kun down. They were in their pajamas, but they didn’t seem to care. ...It was all very intense.”

Kimi had climbed on top of her brother and punched him in the face.

She had not known how to throw a punch. She had simply clenched her right fist and punched him like she had seen the adults do it. She had punched him again and again. Her fist had struck his teeth and felt like it would break.

“Can’t feel anything!?”

As her voice had filled the air, she had swung her fist again.

“Listen! You aren’t Horizon!”

She had punched him, but she had known she was not getting through to him. Words would not get through to him and physical blows had only been shaking him.

But she had continued speaking as if telling him to remember.

“Horizon dying is no reason for you to die!”

His empty eyes had then turned toward her. His gaze had said that was not true.

His gaze had exposed his will much more than her words or blows had hers. His gaze said Horizon had died. It said he did not have the courage to kill himself and so he was simply going to let himself die.

Kimi had seen a smile on his lips as she had punched him.

She understood.

He was aware that he could not feel anything.

He could not feel her blows or her words. He had viewed it as the same as the place to which Horizon had gone.

Horizon could no longer feel anything and the same was happening to him.

...So...

He had smiled.

...And that is why...

“To hell with that!!”

Kimi had reached into her pocket for what she had brought from the dining room table. She had pulled it out, popped off the lid, and jammed it into Toori’s smiling mouth.

It was a salt shaker.

She had shoved it into his mouth.

“!?”

And despite his questioning look, she had grabbed the bottom of the glass container and shaken it as if trying to mix together everything in his mouth.

She had felt the salt pouring out into her brother’s mouth. It had all poured out without stopping.

It had not just fallen on his tongue. It had poured deep in his throat as if he had swallowed it.

...Die.

She had honestly thought that. She had known that would not kill him, but she had definitely thought it.

She had wished for his current self to die and disappear.

And a moment later...

“...!!”

Toori’s body had shaken and he had forcefully thrown his head backwards.

His self-imprisonment in the illusion that he could feel nothing had come from a barrier in his mind. By relying on that, he had been able to put up with the

pain. He had cut his feelings off from his mind.

But that flavor and the reaction of his body had been unexpected.

The tongue was a collection of blood vessels. The inside of the mouth was a mucous membrane with blood vessels on the surface. Even if it felt dry, it had moisture and it quickly absorbed substances. The salt had immediately entered the blood vessels and reached his starving body.

“...!?”

In what may have been the shock of his body’s rejection, Toori had bent backwards and thrown his hands about.

He had scratched at Kimi with the nails that had grown long due to neglect.

However...

“Ha ha.”

Kimi had rejoiced.

After all, her brother had moved.

She had done it. Spices were amazing.

More. Yes. More and more spices. This is working. Delicious, isn’t it? It is enough to make you bend backwards. How about some pepper? And tabasco. Maybe some chili powder. Mom likes shichimi, doesn’t she?

I can feel it pouring out in my hand. How lovely. After all, that sensation is making my brother move.

Amazing. I am truly moved. I can see why pepper is worth a gold coin per grain.

What a fool. Trembling, struggling, and scratching around like that has drawn blood. Heh heh. Why are you letting some spill from your mouth? Oh, is the bottle in the way? Then I will remove it. That way you can eat all of the contents. Look, I will remove it. I will punch you and then remove it. Right, then left. There, it’s gone. Oh, dear. Are you crying? Do not worry. I won’t tell you to stop. Move more and more. Shout out, cry...

“And remember your feelings.”

Kimi had shoved her bloody hand into her brother's mouth. She had wrapped her fingers around the sand-like roughness inside his mouth and she had rubbed it onto his gums, underneath his tongue, and behind his teeth.

But her brother had bitten down. He had split the skin of her fingers, torn off some flesh, and most certainly swallowed a bit.

But Kimi had finally taken a sigh of relief.

"Blood, flesh, trembling, and tears. ...Have you regained a bit of what Horizon lost?"

Toori had responded by opening his bloodshot eyes and staring at her.

She had removed her blood-stained hand from his mouth and used her fingers to wipe off his mouth and teeth which still had salt and spices on them.

"Have you returned? No... That is not what I should ask," she had said. "You did not even manage to go where Horizon is, you...foolish brother!"

Toori had taken action in response.

His face had twisted, he had covered his eyes with his too-skinny arms, and his mouth had opened.

"Ahh..."

He had raised a torn voice and cried.

Hearing his voice for the first time in a while and feeling him trembling below her had led Kimi to breathe another sigh of relief.

People had gathered around them, but she had not cared. All that mattered was hearing her brother's emotion-filled voice for the first time in months.

Whether he had been frustrated, regretful, disappointed, or maddened, he had indicated himself by raising a voice not much different from a newborn's. Kimi had taken another even deeper breath when she heard his cry.

"Yes."

The elder sister had lifted up her younger brother and gently yet awkwardly embraced him.

"It's okay."

She had brought her lips to the tears spilling from his eyes.

“Listen. Always live your life like you are crying. When you laugh and when you get angry, do it like you were only just born. Cry out like a newborn taking its first breaths. And then save those who cannot do the same. Live your life such that you take back the things that are lost or taken after people’s births. I will help you do so.”

The tears on her tongue had tasted like blood.

“Children are born while covered in blood. And people are able to cry because they wish to soak themselves in the flavor of blood and be reborn.”

If she had kissed him, he would have tasted the same. And that was how she had known her brother was alive. He had been living. He had been covered in the tears that tasted of blood. Those tears did not flow in death. They flowed only while alive.

With that thought, the tension of her own mind and body had suddenly vanished.

“Ee.”

Tears had spilled out and her jaw had twisted.

“ ... ”

She had cried. She had not known why. She thought it might have been to act foolishly to trick him, but whatever the reason, her brother’s crying had spread to her and she had raised her own crying voice as if to share in the feeling causing the tears.

She had cried loudly.

“On that day, Kimi did not come to the academy either, but they were both at my family’s shrine when I returned. Toori-kun looked incredibly refreshed and he was pulling on Kimi’s hand as she cried.”

“Did they make a contract with a god?” asked Masazumi.

Asama closed her eyes and nodded.

“And ever since, they have been like this. We may have grown accustomed to it, but I think they have even powered up since back then.”

But...

“The rest of us can’t thank Kimi enough for keeping Toori-kun with us.”

Masazumi then heard a noise.

The speed and the dance collided on the bridge. It began with flying sparks and a great high-pitched noise.

Futayo’s speed had caught up with Kimi’s dance and was beginning to overcome it.

And she heard a voice. It was Futayo’s shout that could be called a battle cry.

“Ohhhhhh!!”

Immediately afterwards, an especially loud noise and an explosion of bright sparks burst from atop the bridge.

Futayo thrust the tip of Tonbokiri toward Kimi’s chest.

She did not hold back. She added the force of the thrusting spear to her own speed to increase the speed of the attack. She could not reach this opponent without doing so.

Her speed was already near its limit. Her legs were filled with heat and she was sweating horribly. She was also gasping for breath. Her movement spell was a type of bodily divine protection and it functioned using substation Blessings from several personal precept settings.

The bottom of her foot audibly struck the ground and that force added to her speed.

“Ohhhh!!”

Sparks burst out.

“!”

She made it through.

The tip of her spear continued past that special barrier that felt gentle and viscous.

She continued on. And the blade arrived at Kimi's sweaty chest. For just an instant, the tip pressed in the white skin and flesh, but the elasticity of the skin quickly caused it to return and the blade stabbed through.

Her weapon pierced her opponent.

She did not hold back. A few red drops of blood rose up between the tip and the rest of the blade. They bulged out and then spilled down the front of Kimi's cleavage.

And yet Futayo saw a smile on Kimi's face ahead of her.

She showed off her teeth and seemed to be enjoying herself.

But...

“———”

As her lips moved, she was no longer singing.

Her dance had stopped and her movements had taken a different form.

Futayo had caught up, but Kimi had not stopped.

“Why don't you shout out as if crying?” she asked while still smiling.

Futayo heard her laugh.

And then Kimi loosened her flushed cheeks, bent her eyes in a smile, and drew back her head.

She twisted her body, held her arms forward so as to lift up her breasts, and stuck out her tongue.

Her wet tongue licked up the blood gathered between her raised breasts and then she placed the tip of her tongue on the spear tip sticking into her chest.

“Heh heh.”

The spear tip created a shallow split in her tongue.

Above the slimy pale red object, the color red welled up and spread out as if soaking in.

But Kimi shuddered as she let the color cover her tongue. She seemed to be greatly enjoying the flavor on the tip of her tongue as she licked her lips as if applying lipstick. She licked her lips again and lightly bit her lower lip to even out the coloring.

“...”

She let out a breath that was filled with the same heat as her flushed cheeks.

She took in a shallow breath, opened her lips, and narrowed her eyes.

“I am an indecent girl, don’t you think?”

A realization then came over Futayo.

...Don’t tell me this was part of the dance!

Her question had been the same as the side shows and talking used in the pauses of songs and dances. When a dancer had a partner, she would perform a dialogue with that partner.

And Futayo realized that this was very bad.

...I was asked the question while playing the role of the partner.

But she could think of nothing to say in response.

“Kh...”

Tonbokiri’s handle bent in her hands. A counterforce was sent back toward her.

The spear had been repelled because she had been unable to reply to Kimi during her dance.

Kimi gently raised her arms in preparation to continue the dance.

“How disappointing. I was hoping to teach you how this tastes.”

As soon as Kimi spoke, Futayo heard a high-pitched noise burst out and she was blown away.

She had been rejected because she had interfered with Kimi’s spell yet been unable to keep up.

After being blasted several meters away, Futayo made an instantaneous decision.

Her speed had been defeated, so she had only one other option.

...I will win!

She had already stopped holding back.

But this decision went beyond the level of holding back or not.

“Tonbokiri!”

She would use Tonbokiri’s cutting power. That divine weapon used spells and other things to cut, so it was a sure thing.

Unlike her father, she was not an expert at using the weapon. She could not use the superior drive that cut phenomena. However, she could use the normal drive that activated the cutting power from a name.

If she used it, her opponent would die. She had to understand that likelihood.

Her opponent was a Far Eastern citizen and an academy student. The true enemy she needed to face was someone else.

...But that enemy opposed my father as he used Tonbokiri!

The destruction of Mikawa meant that her father had not lost. However, the enemy who had opposed him was still alive.

Tonbokiri had not defeated that enemy.

...Why!?

How strong had her father, the unparalleled in the east, been? How powerful was the famous spear of Tonbokiri?

...Why?

Her question produced a shout.

“If you wish to take the fight to the outside world, you must at least surpass Tonbokiri!!”

The blade reflected Kimi and Futayo called out to the weapon.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

The user rights had already been set to her and she had tested it out in secret. She had been scolded for the furniture she destroyed, but she had simply been a bit unprepared. She had decided to try it on something smaller than a table next time.

...How could I make a mistake like that!?

As she thought, she saw light run along Tonbokiri's blade.

The cutting power raced out.

Yoshinao had stopped moving.

His hand held forward to stop them and his opened mouth were both frozen in place.

"..."

He returned his hand to his side and closed his mouth.

As he watched, no one else was moving. Futayo who stood with her back to him while holding Tonbokiri, Kimi standing beyond her, and his wife by his side were all motionless. The same was true of everyone on both the port and starboard sides.

He heard a voice from behind him and to the right.

"Heh heh. You're more hairy than I thought. Quit blushing. I know a dirty beast like you isn't innocent."

"Dirty? Dirty? Dirty joke?"

But those voices did not count, so he ignored them.

He focused forward.

...If she used that cutting power...

Kimi would have been unable to avoid it.

"..."

Just as he had expected, the sleeves hanging from Kimi's arms had been cut in two horizontally.

As the sleeves fell down, the wind caught them and tossed them through the air. The body of her uniform and the waist of her suit had been cut in two as well, so they too fluttered in the wind.

However...

“Oh, dear. What if I catch cold?”

Kimi calmly stroked the exposed skin from below her breasts down to her navel.

Her fingers wiped sweat from her skin, but she was unharmed.

Yet the cut clothing proved that the cutting power had reached her.

“...?”

Yoshinao’s question must have reached his wife because new strength filled the hand tugging on his sleeve.

Futayo’s back swayed a bit in front of his eyes.

“What?”

Her voice held clear surprise.

Futayo tilted her head as she watched Kimi stroke her sweaty skin.

“Heh heh heh. Hopeless girl, what has you so surprised?”

“But...”

For a moment, Futayo seemed to be thinking, but she finally made up her mind.

“May I try again?”

“What kind of ridiculous request is that!?” shouted the surrounding crowd in unison.

Futayo flinched back, but Kimi looked down at her outfit which had been slit top from bottom and contained the remains of the sleeves on the wrists.

“Could you cut this part away from below the chest? It’s all sweaty.”

“I just need to adjust the angle. ...Can you do it, Tonbokiri?”

“I can,” replied the spear.

“Okay.” Futayo prepared herself. “Bind, Tonbokiri.”

As Kimi held her arms diagonally outward, the remains of the sleeves split in two and fell off. The area of the uniform below her breasts was cut once more and a tube-shaped piece of cloth opened up and fell away from her abdomen.

Kimi’s body was now fully exposed from below the breasts down to below her navel.

But...

“...You are unharmed.”

Hearing Futayo’s comment, Kimi tilted her head and used a finger to wipe up some of the blood on her injured chest.

“Heh heh heh. What a fool. Of course I am unharmed.”

“How can you be so certain!?”

“Because Tonbokiri cuts names. I use many stage names such as Josephine and Suzanne. Those names hold little weight and a blade will always slip to where it can cut the easiest.”

“W-wait!” shouted Futayo. “It may reduce the power, but Tonbokiri can still cut stage names and machine designations!”

“Oh, is that so? That is too bad. Whenever that spear has cut a stage name or something similar, it must have been with someone *who truly believed that name referred to them.*”

“Then what are those stage names to you?”

“A fashion. They are no different from clothes. That is why they were cut along with my clothes.”

Yoshinao heard Kimi laugh.

“A flower’s name has nothing to do with the flower itself. It is merely something someone else gave it. No matter how much that name is defiled, it means nothing at all to the flower. ...If you are going to rely on that when you attack, your power will need to increase a thousand-fold before you can reach

me.”

As she spoke, Kimi stepped forward.

Futayo tried to back away, but Kimi continued forward and stood in front of her.

“Open your eyes.”

She slapped Futayo’s cheek.

Such a pain, thought Kimi as she threw another slap.

As she felt the clear noise travelling through her hand, she knew what she had to say.

“You made three mistakes.”

She slapped in the opposite direction.

“To begin with... Heh heh. It was all over for you from the moment you opposed a girl as wonderful as me. After all, a proper girl will not lose to anyone but the one they have fallen for.”

Another slap, another high-pitched noise.

“Secondly, it seems speed is your main selling point, but you cast it aside after someone as dignified as me rejected you just once. Even if you know I am a poor match, you are supposed to show your will power by attacking again and again. If you cannot do that, I will never let you reach my body or heart.”

She threw a backhand slap and placed her fingers on Futayo’s cheek.

Her cheek was swollen from the slaps and it was covered in blood that had scattered from Kimi’s fingers.

Kimi wiped off that blood and spread it on Futayo’s lips as lipstick.

“Are you listening?” began Kimi. “Lastly, you should not be obeying that cosplaying King of Musashi, the Testament Union, or your own insufficient brains that told you this is for the sake of the Far East.”

“But...”

“If you are a Far Eastern samurai, then isn’t it your duty to obey the ruler of the Far East?”

Kimi placed her hands on her hips and thrust out her chest along with Uzy on her shoulder.

“As a samurai, it is your duty to rescue Horizon! Just how badly do you have to mess that up to actually make her your enemy!? If you understand, then prostrate yourself before me! Sit!!”

As she shouted and pointed, Futayo paused and then lowered her head.

“Judge!!”

She forcefully placed her knees and hands on the floor and she swung her hair forward.

“I gave this too much thought and was on the verge of making a horrible mistake! You may have an indecent body, but you gave me, your enemy, accurate advice! I am in your debt!!”

“Heh heh. Foolish girl, as long as you understand.”

Kimi then turned toward her brother who was smiling and embracing a bucket.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, do you have anything to say?”

“Yeah. Thanks a bunch.” He continued on. “I’m glad to have you as my sis.”

Kimi did not stop a gentle smile from welling up from below her cheeks.

“I see.” She nodded and turned toward Yoshinao. “Heh heh heh. King, what will you do now? I have won.”

But before he could answer, a voice spoke from the sky.

“That’s right. What are you going to do, hm?” said the calm, deep voice.

“What decision will the Testament Union-appointed King of Musashi make? Will you transfer your royal authority as the former chancellor suggested earlier?”

Now...

“What will it be? Give me your answer, King of Musashi.”

Chapter 34: Those Running Toward the Borderline

CHAPTER 34

"Those Running Toward the Borderline"



How much do people
Make the past their peak?

Point Allocation (From Here On)

How much do people

Make the past their peak?

Point Allocation (From Here On)

What would he do with the authority of king?

On the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy's school building, Yoshinao thought about the Papa-Schola's question he heard behind him.

...How should we respond?

If he clearly sided with the Testament Union he would be the only one with any real power in Musashi.

The previous battle had settled the conflict among the students. The authority of the Chancellor's Officers and Student Council would return to Aoi Toori and the others.

They would be able to decide the future course of Musashi and the Far East.

However, Yoshinao remained. The Testament Union had given him the right to veto any decision made in Musashi.

Aoi Toori had asked him to transfer the authority of king to him, but that was impossible.

Doing so would leave no one to reject them.

Also, the King of Musashi had the authority to make practical decisions for the Musashi. Transferring that authority would give him full control of the Musashi as a ship.

If Aoi Toori became King of Musashi, no one could deny him anything and he could use the Musashi as he wished.

But the Testament Union viewed him as dangerous and they would use that as justification for opposing Musashi.

Yoshinao wanted to avoid that opposition if at all possible.

...And the words of the adults are generally correct.

He felt adventure was important, but he also felt one must not act rashly or despair due to a lack of experience. Even if he was to respect their wishes, he needed to stop any recklessness and urge them to be careful.

...But what would happen if Horizon Ariadust did return as a princess?

If she desired her power as ruler, she would come into conflict with his position as King of Musashi.

Transferring the title of king to her would avoid a revolution by the people, but that would once again leave everything to those inexperienced youths.

As he wondered what should be done, he asked a question.

“Aoi Toori, what will you do once you rescue her?”

“I will regain everything.”

They had heard that the Logismoi Óplo had been made with her emotions.

“And what will you do once you regain everything?”

“I will be with her,” he replied. He then continued. “After all, I don’t want to say goodbye. But...”

At that word, the tug of Yoshinao’s wife’s hand on his left sleeve strengthened.

“We, you all are telling me to leave her, aren’t you?”

“Well...”

Yoshinao started to speak but stopped.

...What are we doing?

What had he thought when he had left his territory to the Testament Union long ago?

He had more or less known what the Testament Union would do.

...But we thought it was better than letting them be destroyed.

If he was with them, the people would have relied on him and not feared making an enemy of a nation.

And so he decided the people would give up on fighting if he left. If he had

not put them under the protection of the Testament Union while he still could, it would have all been over.

...But...

That land had completely changed and the people had scattered.

What did that mean?

He felt conflict was a bad thing.

But he also felt he should have remained in that land.

...What should we have done?

As he thought that, he heard the boy's voice.

"We, the King of Musashi shouldn't be worrying that much. A king's gotta be dignified, right? Am I wrong?"

Those words helped Yoshinao make up his mind.

And he spoke his decision.

The people of Musashi saw the King of Musashi flip up his cape on top of the bridge.

The red cloth and gold staff moved. He let go of the queen's hand and puffed out his chest while standing next to her.

"As promised, we will return the authority of the Chancellor's Officers and Student Council."

The king's words brought a moment silence.

"———"

And it was quickly followed by cheers.

However...

"But!"

Yoshinao continued speaking so as to silence the cheers rising from the Musashi's deck.

“We cannot transfer our authority as king! Not even when Princess Horizon returns. The Testament Union sent us to Musashi to be its king!”

That announcement silenced the crowd, but it brought a laugh from the sky.

“Ha,” said Innocentius within the sign frame. “Ha ha ha! That’s what I thought. Your fear of opposing the Testament Union won’t let you transfer your authority as king, but Musashi can never gain freedom like that. No matter what, you remain under the control of the Testament Union.”

“However...”

The king’s continued words stopped Innocentius’s laughter.

In the silence that brought, Yoshinao spoke slowly.

“To bear the responsibility of gathering the Logismoi Óplo and resolving the Apocalypse, we will share our authority with two viceroys who will act as our assistants. The shared authority shall be split with us having two shares and each viceroy having a single share. Also, we appoint Far East Representative and Mikawa Ruler Horizon Ariadust as one viceroy and Musashi Ariadust Academy Student Council President and Chancellor Toori Aoi as the other.”

Which meant...

“King of Musashi!!” shouted Innocentius. “So you are effectively giving a portion of your authority as king to the students of Musashi!?”

“We retain the royal right to veto, your holiness. After all, with our upcoming duty, there will be times when an immediate decision will be needed even if something were to happen to us. It is only logical to create a viceregal position to act under us. By our reckoning, this will not interfere with the role of ‘guide’ that the Testament Union gave us. If you insist we are opposing the Testament Union in this action, please explain why so that we may do our best to remove any misunderstandings.”

“Have you gone mad!? No, have you grown intoxicated on sentimentality and taken the students’ side, King of Musashi!?”

“Your holiness.” Yoshinao lightly bent his knees and lowered his head. “Even one as low as us is the king of the small nation of Musashi. We cannot directly

face you as we are not a student, but our position is still equal to yours. We will ignore that comment as a mere jest. After all, we are still the King of Musashi. ... And as king, we must never leave our people and we must share in those people's suffering and hardships so that we might do our best to resolve them."

And...

"Your holiness, you are the head of the Tsirhc Catholics, you are the representative of K.P.A. Italia, and you are one representative of the Testament Union. ...However, you are not the Testament Union itself. If you wish to say the Testament Union finds fault in our actions, you must first hold a Testament Union Representative Council with representatives from all the Testament Union academies."

"A Testament Union Representative Council is a type of international council. To hold a council in this era, we must use the history recreation of the ecumenical council or something similar. However, the Testament shows no further ecumenical councils since the end of the Council of Trent which displayed the Counter-Reformation against the Protestants."

"There is one council you can use."

Yoshinao looked down at his hand.

He held a piece of paper soaked in ink. It had been crumpled up and a brown algae creature had brought it to him.

However, the creatures spoke as they hopped up from the bucket Toori held.

"Have this."

"Important. Masazumi gave it."

Yoshinao nodded and looked at the text on the note. It was wet with ink, but he could still read it.

"Someone has already planned where you should hold the Testament Union Representative Council."

Yoshinao glanced to the port side where he saw someone standing in the schoolyard.

It was Masazumi.

She took a step forward, placed a hand on her chest, and spoke clearly.

“There is one council given in the last Testament description before it ceased updating. It is not an ecumenical council, but it could be called Europe’s very first political international council. That council is the Peace of Westphalia.”

She took a breath.

“That council brought an end to the religious war between the Protestants and Catholics known as the Thirty Years’ War as well as other wars. It also created several international laws. Due to the Apocalypse, people are viewing that council as accepting the destruction of the world; but how about you use that council to determine whether Musashi and the Far East are in the wrong or not?”

With Kimi returned, all of the students except Toori were gathered on the port side. They had gathered around to discuss what Masazumi had said.

“What is the Peace of Westphalia?” asked Tenzou.

Neshinbara answered as he produced a sign frame to display historical material.

“As Honda-kun said, it is a peace council for the Thirty Years’ War and some other wars. It began in 1644 and includes the council for both the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabrück. The decisions were written up in the Treaty of Westphalia which was signed on October 24, 1648. The treaty gave structure to the national sovereignty which Honda-kun mentioned earlier, it defined national borders, and it gave independence to Holland and Switzerland.”

“What did the peace treaty say?”

“Hexagone Française and Sweden expanded while the principalities within M.H.R.R. gained sovereignty and the power of the emperor was weakened. That’s why people are discussing whether it can be used to crush P.A. Oda which is working along with M.H.R.R.”

As he spoke, Neshinbara looked up at the king’s back on the bridge as well as

Masazumi's back in front of him.

"The early battles of the Thirty Years' War are already beginning, so the representatives of the academies will have to gather in the M.H.R.R. region of Westphalia to question the justice of our actions. ...At the very least, we are not just or evil until that happens."

"That's right," agreed Masazumi with a glance back toward the group. "It may be odd for me to say something here, but..."

"Heh heh heh. Flat chest worshipper, my foolish brother has given his approval, so we can't have you not giving your political point of view."

Kimi's comment caused Masazumi to smile bitterly toward the ground.

"By leaving this to the representative council, we gain a justification for Musashi's safety." She nodded. "We are relying on the Testament Union's decision concerning our existence, but the Testament Union is an organization. No matter how much a single member shouts at us, it does not qualify as a decision. And so each nation will need its own justification if it is to oppose us."

"But that means you must be prepared for conflict with the Testament Union until the Peace of Westphalia," said Innocentius. "After all, that conflict will continue until the peace council ends. Each nation will act out of its desire for the Far East until you arrive there."

In other words...

"Musashi will be in an all-out conflict against the Testament Union until Westphalia."

"If there is an end in sight, there is meaning in persisting. Our goal is to arrive at Westphalia, to prove to the other nations that siding with us is in their best interest, and to gather the Logismoi Óplo in order to save the world from the Apocalypse."

Masazumi raised a finger toward the image of the pope-chancellor's face in the sky.

She raised her eyebrows in a smile.

"We will return the Logismoi Óplo to their rightful owner. Then the nations in

conflict with us will merely be hindering us from resolving the Apocalypse.”

Everyone followed her gaze as she looked up toward the bridge.

Yoshinao, his wife, and Toori stood there.

Toori seemed to want people to focus on him because he danced around behind Yoshinao and hid everything but his arms behind the man to make it look like the man had four arms.

“What are you doing?” asked Innocentius.

“Is that any way to talk to me, pope!?”

“You’re one to talk,” muttered everyone else, but Toori ignored them.

Everyone started whispering amongst themselves.

“There’s a lot alike about those two.”

“I think the only difference is their position.”

“No, I think the pope-chancellor would excommunicate himself if he groped someone’s breasts.”

“I am growing very sick of this, so I will keep it short,” said Innocentius. “As a representative of the Testament Union, I sense danger in Musashi’s decision. You possess a Logismoí Óplo, you are interfering with the recreation of the history descriptions, and Mikawa must be restored. K.P.A. Italia insists on an immediate resolution to these three issues.”

Namely...

“As initially planned, Horizon Ariadust will commit suicide, the Logismoí Óplo will be extracted, and Musashi’s authority will be transferred to restore Mikawa.”

“I see. Then you go do your thing.” Toori’s voice filled the air. “And I’ll go confess to Horizon.”

“Damn you!”

“Shut up. I’ll say it again!”

Toori pointed directly at the face displayed in the sky.

“Old man, what do you think you’re doing right now!?” he shouted. “You’ve captured my (or soon to be my) Horizon and are executing her!? But right now... What was it? Um... Oh! Right now you have her stripped naked and bound with chains! Ahhh, and you’re torturing her in all sorts of wet and messy ways, aren’t you!? Dammit, you have a really perverted religion, you know that!?”

“We are doing nothing of the sort!!”

As everyone watched the *cadena firma* next to the Tres Españan tent, they turned toward their commander.

As they glared at him, he frantically shook his head.

“W-we really aren’t doing that.”

“No, you definitely are!” continued the boy on the screen. “I know you are! I’ve studied enough porn games to know that! The Catholic witch hunts and princess tormenting are entire genres, you know!? That’s a standard!”

“What does that have to do with anything!?”

“Shut up!” Musashi’s chancellor bent his body and struck a pose. “Listen! You’ve set a fire in my lewd heart!! I won’t forgive you now!!”

Gin then spoke.

“I do not understand what he is saying, but he has brought momentum to his side.”

“Gin, you do not need to force a compliment,” said Muneshige. “But this is going to lead to war.”

Meanwhile, the Papa-Schola spoke once more.

“I will give you a warning. We will act as planned. If you interfere, it will produce a confrontation between students as per the academy rules. I do not feel like saying anything more.”

With that, the *cadena firma* vanished.

In its place, the high-pitched noise of a whistle sounded.

The whistle continued for a long while and traveled far into the distance. It

was followed by Oriotorai's voice.

"Musashi Ariadust Academy's side has won this confrontation! Everyone involved, please act in accordance with the initial agreement! This has been carried out with the Testament Union's approval."

She took a breath.

"And so rescuing Mikawa Ruler Horizon Ariadust is the official decision of the Far East!!"

People could be heard crying out. Some were cheering and others sounded uncertain or determined.

But those voices communicated a certain fact.

The confrontation meant to determine Musashi's will had come to an end.

As the wind indicating the end of the afternoon blew through and as people's voices filled the air, Yoshinao heard Toori speak from next to him.

"Now then. It's time to get going."

"Wait."

Yoshinao wanted to ask him how he could be so lighthearted, but Toori turned toward him before he could.

With a smile on his face, he looked at Yoshinao and his wife.

"We, you can be surprisingly reckless. I thought you were just the obedient type who always does the safe thing and chooses the glasses girl from the library committee when he plays a porn game."

Yoshinao's wife brought a hand to her lips and laughed.

"But I was on the athletics committee."

"Oh! Way to go, We! You have a hidden side to you! Are you actually a wild beast!?"

"Quiet down."

His crest had once been a wild beast and he did not feel like arguing the issue.

But then Toori faced forward.

He said nothing more and simply began walking.

“Wait. Do you not need help?”

Yoshinao had assumed he would call out to someone else because he could do nothing himself. However, Toori spoke to no one in particular while walking down the stairs alone.

“I can’t do anything. ...But there’s a little something I want to do.”

He took a breath.

“So I’m gonna head out for a bit.”

Everyone listened to him speak as he descended the stairs.

“Listen. All of you taught me that we can rescue Horizon if we work together.”

And so...

“You don’t have to rescue her. I’m the one that wants to. You don’t have to stick with me any longer.”

He walked.

“Despite what he said, that old pope guy won’t do anything if all of you don’t do anything. If I go and get scolded a bit, that’ll be the end of it.”

But...

“For me, just knowing there’s a way to save her is enough. *Horizon isn’t someone who can only die. She isn’t someone who has no option besides being killed.* Just knowing that is great. At the very least, I know Horizon wasn’t born just to die.”

He smiled.

“Even if I can’t do it, all of you can. So remember this: if you ever have someone important to you and they’re in trouble, you can save them.”

He continued walking.

“You all can do it. As someone who can’t, I guarantee it.”

Yoshinao started to call out to Toori as he walked down the stairs.

...That fool!

He was doing the same thing Yoshinao had long ago. He had once thought that his absence would protect his territory, but that had not happened.

He hesitated to say it because it would reveal a mistake of his past.

But...

“Wai-...”

Just as he started speaking, his wife tugged on his sleeve.

“Honey.”

...She is trying to stop us?

Wondering why, he looked around in surprise.

He heard a noise.

Among Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Chancellor’s Officers, Student Council members, Aoi Toori’s classmates, and the guard unit on the port side, some people began walking, some began jogging, and they all started toward the stairs leading down from the bridge.

...Are they...?

All of them had exasperated looks or bitter smiles. Some of them were using their handheld shrines to presumably contact their families.

“Yeah, sorry. But I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t do this.”

With comments like that, they all arrived at the staircase. And as Yoshinao watched from above, they turned their backs to him and began following Toori.

The crowd gathered below watched Toori and the group gathering behind him.

“Oh...”

They let out voices and opened a path. It looked like a canyon forming to create a straight path along the earth.

And the group traveled down that path. Yoshinao viewed them as moving toward something rather than leaving.

After all...

“They intend to retrieve the princess.”

As he spoke, Yoshinao thought.

...We have a feeling the people of our former territory were like this too.

He had decided to leave them in an attempt to protect them because he had been trying to protect them all on his own.

...That is not how it is done.

They were meant to work together to protect the place in which they could be together.

He belatedly realized that a king was meant to make everyone want to do that. He had tried to protect them but had only convinced himself that he had done so.

And then he heard a voice from behind him.

“Oh, I need to take them back.”

A short figure arrived with loud footsteps.

He saw a girl wearing glasses, a uniform with hard points too large for her body, and a vassal's mobile shell connection parts as shoes. He was fairly certain her name was Adele.

She picked up the bucket containing the brown algae creatures in her right hand and she held something else in her left hand.

...A vassal's heavy spear?

He had occasionally seen her with a training spear for a mobile shell. She had used the same the night before. However, this was his first time seeing this one with an actual blade attached.

And he saw a beast crest on the handle of the old heavy spear.

...That is the crest of our territory.

“Y-you! Adele-kun!”

“Eh? What is it, king?”

She frantically turned around. It seemed she had not expected to have her name called. Worried he had frightened her, he worked to restrain himself.

“Where are you originally from?”

“Eh?” she replied with a sidelong glance toward the others going on ahead. But she soon nodded and smiled. “Well, I was born on the Musashi. My father moved around a lot, though.”

“Is that so? And your father?”

“Judge.” She nodded and the ends of her eyebrows lowered a bit. “He has passed away, but I hear he was from Hexagone Française.”

His wife tugged on his sleeve, but Adele continued speaking without being asked.

“It seems our Balfette family was originally from a small self-governed territory near the border with Tres España. According to my father, the king was a good person but he was a bit too considerate. When the territory was trapped between Tres España and Hexagone Française, that king ultimately sold himself to the Testament Union in exchange for the promised safety of the territory. ... Of course, the Testament Union didn’t keep up their end of the bargain.”

He listened.

“My father would always say he wondered if the king sold himself because he and the other people didn’t do a good enough job. He said the king could have been braver, but they still should have done more themselves. And that’s why he would always tell me to protect my king.”

“...”

“Ah ha ha.” Adele laughed and raised her baggy sleeves. “But I still can’t properly use the mobile shell he left for me.”

“And what are you going to do now?”

“Judge.” She immediately responded to his question. “I am on my way to

protect our king.”

She smiled before continuing.

“I’m glad.”

“About what?”

“That you were so brave just now. I think my dad must have been glad he came to Musashi.”

Hearing that, Yoshinao took in a breath. He felt a trembling on the edge of his cheek, but he still puffed out his chest.

“Of course! The King of Musashi must be brave!!”

“Judge. I’ll be going now.”

“Te-...”

He started to see her off by saying “testament”, but he stopped.

“Judge,” he said instead. “Did I pronounce that correctly?”

“Judge!”

“Judge. Now go protect your king.”

His wife grabbed his hand rather than his sleeve. By the time he squeezed her slender fingers in return, the vassal with the beast crest was already starting down the stairs.

Also...

“Who is that?”

The crowd of people split along a side road on the starboard side. They formed a path for someone who was meeting up with the others.

As the people took a step back, the person came into view.

“Azuma-kun!”

“Now, then. Things have gotten noisy again up above.”

Two figures sat on a wheelchair in a small room with no walls.

Miriam held a small girl whose naked body was partially transparent.

She operated the wheelchair.

“Can this thing enter cradle mode? It’s pretty old.”

She was unsure, but the wheelchair did its job. It began shaking like it was being rocked by very, very gentle waves.

As it shook with the rise and fall of breathing, the girl placed her head on Miriam’s chest.

“Are you sleepy?” she asked.

The girl shook her head and got up again.

“Where’s papa?”

“Is mama not good enough?”

The girl thought for a moment and shook her head.

However...

“Where’s papa?”

“Why do I feel so humiliated? Does that boy emit some kind of charismatic power that only works on little girls?”

She thought for a moment and looked up at the ceiling from which distant cheers could occasionally be heard. She then turned to the door which no longer had any guards outside it.

And then the girl in her arms spoke.

“Mama? You aren’t going to papa?”

“Eh?” Miriam looked at her own body, the wheelchair, and the girl in her arms. “Well, there are a lot of issues and I’m fine with being here for the time being. As things are, I can’t even open the door or go out. ...And none of my classmates are going to stop by today.”

She lightly embraced the girl and let the rocking of the wheelchair take over as she looked up at the ceiling and smiled.

“Do your best, everyone. I’ll be waiting.”

As soon as she said that, a sudden knock came to the room's sliding door.

"Um, Miriam Poqou-san? This is Sanyou from the teaching staff. Oriotorai-sensei told me to bring you a report on today's events in place of one of the students. May I come in?"

"Oh, yes."

At that very moment, the little girl suddenly got down from the wheelchair.

"I'm coming in, okay?"

The girl ran toward the sliding door, leaving Miriam behind.

"Ah, w-wait."

As she spoke, a glasses-wearing teacher slid open the door and peeked inside. Miriam held her head in her hands when she saw the translucent naked girl raise her hands in greeting.

This would further spread the misunderstandings about Azuma.

"Hey, Azuma. Should you really be out here?"

As Azuma joined the group of walking students, he heard Toori speak without turning around.

...He's worried about me. But...

"I'm fine."

He had made up his mind after speaking with Miriam and thinking about all sorts of things on his own.

...There are people my presence here will influence.

The emperor had great influence, but he wanted to help his friends. He had spoken with Miriam and decided to make his appearance after the political decision had been made. For those attempting to act on that decision, he could convince anyone who opposed their decision and act as a landmark if they had to make an emergency retreat.

As he walked, Heidi spoke from next to him.

“What happened with that girl from yesterday?”

“Once everything settles down, I plan to go to a police box to discuss the issue. Right now, Miriam is...” Realizing he had just used her first name, he frantically corrected himself. “Poqou-san is looking after her.”

“Oh? Poqou-san is? Is that so?”

Everyone turned fairly scornful smiles toward him and then exchanged a glance.

“Who would have thought the crown prince was that sort of character.”

“S-stop it! You’re being rude to Poqou-san!”

They all laughed. The surrounding people opened a path, but there was more than just confusion on their faces. Some looked doubtful, but others looked hopeful and others even nodded toward them.

They walked down the stairs and headed for the road. As they did, a familiar face appeared in front of them.

“Principal Sakai.”

Beyond a crowd that had already split down the middle, Sakai stood with “Musashi” by his side. He raised a hand.

“Hey. Are you on your way to battle?”

Sakai’s greeting was answered by Toori at the head of the group.

“Hey, principal,” he said with a smile. “If you were here, you should’ve helped us a bit. Seijun was about to cry.”

“I was not.”

“Ha ha. I’m not a student anymore. Also, it would have just irritated the pope-chancellor to see me. That’s why I’ve been hiding.”

“Are you going to stop my classmates and I, principal?”

“That would be ‘my classmates and me’.”

After responding to Asama’s comment, Sakai took a pipe case out of his

pocket.

“I’m not going to stop you. I had my own fight with the pope back in the day.”

He placed the kiseru in his mouth.

“This is difficult. I’m not sure what to say at times like this. ...I like saying things like ‘work hard’ or ‘do your best’. After all, doing those says nothing about *whether you succeed or not*. I’m not telling you to definitely achieve something. As long as you work hard and do your best, it doesn’t matter whether you actually achieve anything or not. I like that kind of lenient way of doing things.”

“...”

“Those who can achieve something will do so. They know the trick. But those who don’t know the trick need to work hard and do their best in order to buy time until they can learn the trick. In other words, don’t work hard or do your best in order to achieve something. Do it to learn the trick you need to achieve something. After all, once you know the trick, you just have to pour all your energy into that.”

He spoke.

“The time you spend working hard and doing your best is a break. It’s an early mock exam.”

So...

“When you’re taking the actual exam, don’t work hard and don’t do your best. You don’t have time for that there. Simply use everything you’ve accumulated up until that point. And if you use all of that and it still isn’t enough...” He took a breath. “Then just make sure you come back alive.”

Adele asked a question as she caught up with the others.

“Is that how it was for you, principal?”

“Well, I wasn’t the principal back then. ...But I had a trick to getting by on the battlefield. And that let me just barely survive.”

He smiled bitterly and breathed smoke from the corner of his mouth.

“The Far East’s academies don’t teach combat, but your teachers have done the best they could. You should have the knowledge necessary. Also, you’ve thought for yourselves about how to fight. So gather everything you have and give it your best shot. We managed and we taught you, so you should be able to manage even better.”

He indicated behind him with his chin and a sign frame appeared next to him.

“Toori, I’ve sent you Horizon’s enrollment recommendation. Take it with you. And make sure all of you come back, Horizon included.”

He received a single word of response from all of them.

“Judge!”

And with that word, they started to walk once more.

A group watched from above as the students walked through the crowd of people on the street.

That group was the Provisional Council gathered on the starboard side of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s schoolyard.

While resting their elbows on the schoolyard fence or puffing on kiseru, they watched the people of Musashi open a path for the students. The people almost seemed to be avoiding them.

However...

“So they really are going with them.”

True to that muttered comment, the students on the staircase and road followed the others. Almost all of the students in the academy were following them now.

And...

“...”

Some of the normal people began to follow them to as if seeing them off or as if being sucked in.

“This will be a conflict between students. We and the other normal people

can no longer do anything directly. This is the first true battle for Musashi.”

“It isn’t fair that the students get to settle everything. The other nations have no upper age limit on students, so it isn’t so bad. But in the Far East, seeing them off like this is so irritating.”

“I will do everything I can to profit here. I will use everything available to me. Young Bertoni and the Mitotsudaira family will make a fuss, but nothing says the normal people must cooperate on all fronts.”

“True,” agreed a man in a suit.

A merchant with a cross hanging from his neck spoke with a smile from next to that man.

“Masanobu-kun, how do you think your daughter, Masazumi-kun, did?”

Masanobu, the man in the suit, was not the one to answer. He had a cigar in his mouth and the men and woman across from him answered instead.

“You’re too cold to that cute girl. She’s always doubting herself. It just makes me want to protect her!”

“The secretaries even got into a fistfight over who would see her home last night, but she ended up leaving on her own.”

“She really surprised those secretaries, although she didn’t realize it herself. All of us hold different positions and our secretaries blathered on and on trying to show off to her, but she managed to combine all of it together and understand it.”

“Yes,” said Masanobu. “But she is completely useless as a politician. Conflict should be avoided, so what kind of politician causes it? Her debate essentially ended in a tie, so she has achieved nothing.”

“She avoided having us go along with what the Testament Union and K.P.A. Italia say. Also, she gave us our justification. If K.P.A. Italia refuses to back off, we can always use that justification.”

Masanobu then replied to the merchant next to him.

“But it disqualifies her from being a politician. Or at least, from being a *Musashi politician* like those of us on the Provisional Council.”

“Then...”

“I am saying she should aim to be something other than *a Musashi politician*,” said Masanobu plainly. “She failed to inherit a historical name and she is not sure who she is, but that inexperienced daughter of mine instinctually chose to be something other than a politician like me. Do you understand? Even a merchant can handle compromise and calculations. And we can provide advice on political decisions. In that case, what Musashi needs right now is not a Musashi politician like us or a bureaucrat council member.”

Instead...

“Musashi needs a politician to act as a prime minister with absolute authority. It needs someone who will provide their king with the answer and the absolute justification he needs.”

“...”

“Konishi, do not forget that we did not interfere today. We are no longer students. So if they do not realize they hold the special privilege of being a student, we will keep it that way. And if we do not...” He brushed a hand through his hair. “How ridiculous. If they had gone with what we recommended, all responsibility would have been forced onto us.”

“Masanobu-kun, I think your expression of love is a bit too twisted.”

“That’s right. That’s right,” agreed the others.

“You’re always being mean to our secret idol. It makes me want to protect her!”

“Ho ho. Personally, just seeing a girl who looks so good cross-dressing cheers me up.”

As he was showered with boos, the corner of Masanobu’s mouth loosened.

“Are you jealous?”

As the booing intensified, Konishi spoke from next to him.

“But why didn’t you come here sooner?”

“Well, I wanted to see who Musashi’s next chancellor would be. It is

unfortunate what that delay meant for my wife.”

“...Musashi’s chancellor?”

“I heard an interesting story from Sakai-sama when he assisted me in Mikawa. This was about ten years ago and he said there was a dumb boy in Musashi.”

He took a breath.

“And that boy had a girl he liked.”

While breathing out smoke, he watched the departing group that included his daughter.

“Due to the circumstances surrounding that girl’s birth, others were always looking out for her. Soon after entering the academy’s elementary school, she was asked to write about her dream in class.”

“Her dream?”

“Everyone in the class wrote about their dream. The class had a variety of dreams: ‘I want to be the world’s greatest merchant’, ‘I want to be the world’s greatest author’, ‘I want to become a knight and protect people’, ‘I want to fill the world with curry’, ‘...’, ‘I want to be the best woman in the world’, *etc.* Now, this girl gave the following dream: ‘I hope everyone’s dreams come true’.”

However...

“All of them knew their dreams would not come true. After all, they were residents of the Far East. As long as they lived in the Far East, they could have wonderful dreams, but those dreams would never come true.”

“...”

“But...”

But...

“But the dumb boy said the following: ‘I will become a king’.” Masanobu smiled. “ ‘I will become a king and create a kingdom where everyone’s dream can come true’ ‘I will become a king and create a kingdom where Horizon can have her own dream’.”

He smiled as he watched his daughter and the others.

“He probably just wanted to look good in front of the girl he liked. But that idiot was hopelessly blunt. If he wanted to make everyone’s dreams come true, becoming a king was the only way. A politician, a merchant, or an engineer wouldn’t be enough. He would have to do what the people of the Far East were not allowed to hope for. He would have to defy the Testament Union and become a king that took back the entirety of the Far East! And only that boy was able to say it.”

And...

“I heard that the others made an oath. They said that idiot was truly an idiot, but they vowed to help him become king if he remained an idiot. And they asked him to become a king and create a kingdom where all their dreams could come true.”

He laughed.

“Didn’t I say it was interesting? We just might witness a king born from the Far East.”

“Then you...?”

“A part of it may have been my desire to escape from Masazumi and how horribly honest she is. But...I’m glad I came. When that boy showed his desire to be chancellor, I did everything I could to make it happen. But then Masazumi came along, was completely useless as a councilor, and started to become something else...”

He sighed.

“I too am inexperienced. I saw that it would end like this, so I hesitated. I wanted it, and yet I tried to push it away. ...But this way is a lot more fun, isn’t it, Masazumi?”

He blew smoke from the corner of his mouth and faced forward. He looked toward the group containing his daughter and the boy who wished to be king.

“How nice.” He breathed out more smoke. “If only I were still a student!”

Konishi lightly tapped his shoulder.

When Masanobu turned around with a frown, Konishi nodded and loosened the fastener of his clothes.

“It’s not all bad. We can still take part in our own way.”

Konishi showed off the shirt under his clothes which had the face of a savage magic girl printed on the chest.

When Masanobu saw it, he and the other councilors brought a hand to their chests and closed their eyes.

“It’s a good thing they didn’t realize who that was last night.”

Toori walked with the others and entered Remorse Way.

With no fear, panic, tension, or anything else, he walked down that road, passed by the stone monument, and thought.

...Oh, that’s right.

He scratched at his head.

“My remorse is nothing compared to how thankful I am now.”

He heard the footsteps of all the people behind him and that noise seemed to push at his back.

“Neshinbara, you work with the guard unit to put together a strategy. And... Honda Futayo.”

“What do you need?”

Toori heard that voice and the sound of armor rubbing together, but he did not turn around.

“You join our school. Could you be our vice chancellor? We can deal with the formalities later, so help us out now as a temporary vice chancellor.”

“As a samurai, I serve my ruler, Horizon-sama, and not you, but if you think that would be best.”

“If you’re doing it for Horizon, that’s good enough for me. ...Also, Asama.”

Asama herself was not the only one to react to her name being called.

“...”

Everyone there cowered down. Tenzou, Urquiaga, Mitotsudaira, Suzu, and even Kimi gulped as Asama's name was called here.

But Asama lightly twisted her body to settle the breath she had gulped and then took another breath.

“What is it?”

“It looks like everyone else is scared, but don't worry about it. Anyway, you know that thing I left with you? The thing you forbade me from using? I think I'll need it before long.”

However, it was not Asama who responded to that.

It was Kimi. She raised her shoulders a bit, crossed her arms, and gave an expression that could be seen as a smile.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, you have not forgotten something important, have you?”

“No, I haven't, sis. I can't do anything on my own. If something happens, I have to rely on everyone else, but I don't blame all of you for that. Also, I will never again...”

Never again...

“Think I should die.”

He turned his head to show Asama a smile.

“So could you make the preparations to put that through, Asama?”

Asama finally closed her eyes and gave a clear reply.



“You wouldn’t listen even if I said no.”

“Thanks.”

Toori then called for his sister and that sister’s voice arrived from a few steps behind him.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, what is it? Are you scared? Or what? Are you giving me the right to use you as my slave for a day!? Nice!”

“Sis, have you forgotten that I always buy you a drink within three minutes? That isn’t it.”

While aware that the smile remained on his face, Toori took in a breath.

And he quickened his pace.

“If I’m rejected, could you make me breakfast just like old times? The one without all the salt.”

As he smiled, he continued speaking at the head of the group.

“Okay, let’s go, everyone. I’m relying on you.”

5:20 PM.

As the evening sun began to set over the western mountains, the K.P.A. Italia and Tres España troops deployed to the Mikawa land port sent out flight-enabled Gods of War to scout out Musashi’s group. At the same time, they began to send their front line forward.

In total they numbered 1427. Of those, approximately one thousand gathered at the western plain near the western exit from the mountain corridor. There they formed a closely packed fortress-like formation known as a Tercio. In conjunction with the aerial ships overhead, they would stop the Far Eastern forces from advancing.

At the same time as those troops advanced, the Tres Españan interrogation ship began to fill its Andamio de la Ejecución with light. That light would lead to the suicide of Mikawa Ruler Horizon Ariadust. The light would reach its peak at precisely 6:00 PM and the light would dismantle her body.

And at 5:22 PM, Musashi's formation exited Mikawa's mountainous region and arrived at the barrier connecting to the western plain forming the shell of the eastern mountain corridor. There, they checked over their respective equipment.

None of them spoke much, but they all understood a certain fact.

The student conflict in Mikawa and the longer conflict over the Logismoi Óplo and the Apocalypse it would lead to were about to begin.

Chapter 35: The Trumpeter at the Start Line

CHAPTER 35

"The Trumpeter at the Start Line"



What happens if the world changes
When that plays?

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

What happens if the world changes

When that plays?

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

Horizon read a book in a room of light.

The wall behind her and the tatami mats below her were covered in curtains of light and not even their color was clear at the moment.

The book in her hand was exposed to the backlight.

...Time-wise and light-wise, this will be the last book I can read.

The book that was sinking into the light was not a hard cover. It was a thin soft cover. She recalled Masazumi carrying these. She had always carried a different one along with her thick hardcover books.

...I believe the latest title Masazumi-sama held was 'Metal Poetry Collection – Man-Yoshu: An Introduction'.

She was currently reading a Chinese warring states mahjong book titled “Romance of the Chii Kingdoms”, but she wanted to ask why the military commanders had to remove a piece of clothing when they lost. Especially since they were all men.

...Oh, Guan Yu gave General Hua Xiong an instant strip. That is one of the special rules.

At that point, she heard a noise from outside the light.

It was a low noise of wind. A group of machines had started to move beyond the wall.

...It sounds a lot like the Musashi.

These noises were a lot quieter, but they were the same type of noise. She could hear the noises disappearing into the sky. And...

“A God of War?”

The sharp sound of something ripping through the air moved into the

distance.

Just as she looked up from her book, the wall spoke. It was the voice of the female student who was looking after her.

“Is something the matter?”

“I heard noises outside.”

“Are you curious?”

Horizon thought for a moment and nodded.

However...

“I honestly have no desire to go outside, so do not worry.”

“Thank you very much. It is impossible for you to get out and it would be dangerous, so um...” She paused for a moment. “Sorry.”

“I do not understand why you are apologizing. Either way, I cannot leave, correct?”

“Testament,” replied the girl. “The field that will dismantle you is currently being tuned within that room. However, a dismantling field wall has been created just outside the room as a side effect of the decoding spell used to examine you.”

“A dismantling field wall?”

“Testament. It is a type of shell that naturally occurs when a dismantling field is gathered inside an area. It has no strength, but the field wall will decode anyone who touches it and they will be devoured by their greatest sin.”

The student took a breath.

“Everyone has a memory of great regret which they cannot deny. The wall will reproduce it and simply ‘dismantle’ the person as a sinner if they are unable to deny it. Not even a beast or ghost can escape it because their sin is carved into their very being. And a sin from one’s past cannot be denied no matter what. After all, one cannot deny the reality of what one has done.”

“Then could I save you all a lot of effort by touching that wall now?”

“We do not simply wish to dismantle you. Your Logismoι Όplo must also be

extracted.” Another slight pause. “Sorry, but please stay as you are.”

“Judge.”

Horizon nodded and looked down at her book. She had been told to stay still, so she could only obey. Once she could no longer read, she would simply close her eyes.

She could hear quite a few noises in the distance.

She wondered when she would cease to sense those noises.

Once that happened, everything would be resolved in the best possible manner. And then there would be nothing left for her to think about.

...If only I had been nothing more than a worker at that snack shop.

“Ah. Now General Yan Liang fell victim to the special rule.”

A single white cloud formed a line through the sky. It disappeared to the north at high speed.

“That’s a Tres Españan *Gran Muñeca*. The aerial ships over there fired a while ago, so it’s probably here to provide reconnaissance. The next time it comes by, it will be equipped for an attack. That should be when their attack really gets going. I wonder if the ones hiding on the port-side mountain will be targeted by that *Gran Muñeca*.”

On the top deck of Musashino’s bow, Neshinbara spoke with several sign frames opened around him. His sign frames were linked to the sign frames of the students commanding the guard unit. With the support of Michizane, his Mouse, he created a shared information network with everyone’s divine transmissions. Rather than working through a shrine, he made a short-range Ley Line connection. After seeing connection confirmations from everyone, he spoke.

“How are things over there, Naito-kun?”

“Well...”

The sign frame produced Naito’s voice and displayed the chest of her uniform.

Her large breasts shook with every breath.

“As you can see, I’m flying through the sky on my wooden broom.”

“Who is responsible for this camera angle that makes me want to call the night watchmen?”

“Oh, Ga-chan is holding the divine transmission spell while she sits behind me. ...Um, Ga-chan? I recommend waiting until tonight to grope my breasts.”

“Heh heh. I want to do it now, Margot. After all, we might all be about to die.”

“Naruze-kun, could you avoid any negative comments before battle?” asked Neshinbara.

“Oh, don’t worry. Margot and I will survive. But could you give me your skull if you die, Neshinbara? Edel Brocken is having a sale where they buy catalysts from you.”

“My life plan is to become an author, die in my home, and be buried in a proper grave.”

“Make sure to give your gravestone a proper epitaph. Something like ‘here lies four-eyes who was too attached to his skull’.”

Neshinbara decided to ignore the Technohexen’s nonsense and he moved on.

“Naito-kun, if I may speak with you.”

“Eh? Oh, are you sure you don’t need anything more with Ga-chan?”

...Quite sure. And can you do something about that chest-focused camera angle?

“How do things look up there?”

“Um, I can share map data from my Technomagie spell connection, right?”

“Judge.”

Neshinbara operated a sign frame and transmitted the map from Michizane’s information bank over a Ley Line connection. Rather than a Shinto-specific divine transmission connection, he used the shared connection that Naito was sending her video from.

“I’ve sent the map. This is shared, so anything you write will be sent back here.”

“Okay. This is what I see.”

Naruze’s hand appeared on the screen and she produced a pen from her sleeve.

The pen was used for spells and it was divided between the tip and the shaft. As she held it out, the white emblem of Edel Brocken was visible.

“Right now, the Mikawa area looks like ∇ with south pointing up. The Musashi is at the bottom tip of the ∇ .”

A red circle appeared around the Musashi’s land port on the map.

And then a red line extended from the circle heading toward the normal land port diagonally up and to the right.

“The central space of the ∇ is a mountain. There are mountains to either side as well. Heading up and to the right takes you through the western mountain pass leading to the normal land port. But about halfway to the land port is the mountain barrier. From there to the land port is the ‘western plain’ used to travel between the Musashi and the ships at the normal land port. The path up to there is dangerous and narrow, so Gods of War cannot traverse it. Trade with the normal port is handled by sending ships to the end of the western plain and traveling by foot and horse from there on.”

As she spoke, the red line continued extending. It was narrow along the mountain pass, but it grew thicker in the western plain and finally stopped at the open plateau of the normal land port.

“Horizon is at this land port. It is about seven kilometers away. That’s a long way, but it can be traveled quickly using acceleration charms. And...”

A line extended east from the land port. It moved from right to left along the top of the ∇ .

“This path leads to the bay created at Mikawa. The abandoned outskirts of the city are there too.”

The red line traveled down the left diagonal line of the ∇ and toward the

Musashi's land port.

"This is the main eastern road to Mikawa that Masazumi and Principal Sakai used yesterday."

Once that line was drawn, the ▽ shape was complete.

Then, two lines were drawn on the normal land port.

"At the top is the interrogation ship Horizon is on and on the bottom is K.P.A. Italia's Regno Unito. Both have landed."

Next, three lines were drawn next to each other on the western plain.

Two were on the normal land port side of the plain while the third was on top of the mountain on the western border of the plain.

"Tres España's guard ships – namely, the frigates not shot down last night – are floating above the western plain's western mountain. We were right not to send out any of the mobile transport ships. They would have been attacked the instant they rose into the air."

"They saw our God of War fire earlier, so they can't carelessly approach either. Of course, they can fire while outside of our range three times over."

"What about their land unit?"

Before his question was answered, another line appeared on the western plain.

"A one thousand man unit has formed Tres España's famous Tercio formation. They have eight mobile cannons. We've also spotted some troops numbering less than a company over toward the land port."

"I see," muttered Neshinbara. "You normally want three units for the Tercio, so they must be short on manpower as well."

He then understood the meaning of the line Naruze had drawn.

"They don't need to win. They just have to hold us back until Ariadust-kun's suicide is complete. To do that, they need to do two things: seal off the land and seal off the air."

Kimi then asked a question while leisurely drinking tea at the table behind

him.

“Hey, doujin author. Will my foolish brother and the others really not be able to tear-cio through that Tercio formation?”

“Well, the Tercio is a major formation with a thick oblong layout of pikemen surrounded by musketeers. It is a fortress-like formation with the musket units placed at the four corners. It is slow, but it is excellent at defending and it does not require great skill from the soldiers. For a combined K.P.A. Italia and Tres España unit, this is probably the safest and most effective formation. They also have cannons, so...”

“Just cut to the chase: is there any way to break it?”

“In Holland and Sweden, they have managed to oppose it in a quick attack with low numbers by using increased firepower and rapid fire. But that’s just the standard. There are plenty of other ways.”

“Such as?”

“Dropping a ship from the sky. The transport ships accompanying the Musashi would do the trick. Fortresses and cities have protective barriers, so it usually won’t work on them, but it would be plenty for a closely-packed formation out on a field,” said Neshinbara nonchalantly. “But that won’t work here. Their aerial ships are prepared to fire on any ship we send from the land port.”

“They will fire on a transport ship just for rising into the air? How intolerant. If this is a confrontation between students, shouldn’t they only target the Musashi and Okutama since the academy is there?”

“I think they’ll start firing on other ships in addition to the transport ships. Have you ever heard of ‘stray shots’? Those can be intentional.”

“Of course I know about that. That’s a shot that leads to marriage via pregnancy. You’re more indecent than you look.”

“That is not what it means!!” He took a breath. “Anyway, once they start firing, I predict that God of War will be back with its full equipment. Our port side is blocked from their view by the mountain in between the land ports, so that God of War will likely be in charge of attacking and holding us in check. Naito-kun, Naruze-kun, I need you two to hold off that God of War. The

Musashi can't move right now because we are preparing for unified control over the ship holding the people of Mikawa."

"How long will that last?"

After Naruze's question, a new divine transmission intruded on the sign frame. It displayed a staticky image of "Musashi's" face.

"The residential ship from Mikawa is currently attaching to the center of the port side. The ship's balance calculations can be done instantly, but it cannot actually fly until the basic complement of water, fuel, and supplies are loaded. The current expected completion time is 6:02 PM. Over."

"Then we'll leave as soon as we rescue Ariadust-kun."

Neshinbara sighed. He displayed a diagram of the Tercio on a sign frame while giving a few instructions to different people.

"The soldiers have it tough. No matter how powerful the God of War, mechanical dragon, or hero, they can't seal off a large space or occupy a city. That means each academy needs to prepare a large number of soldiers, but modern battles are too harsh for them. The days when the heroes could settle everything in one-on-one battles were a lot safer."

While drinking tea at the table set behind him, Kimi turned toward him.

"Heh heh heh. That is not your problem, four-eyes. That is why you people on the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers exist. How about you write a novel with you going at it one-on-one with your equal in K.P.A. Italia or Tres España? In a homoerotic way, of course."

"Could you stop asking me things I can't agree to?"

He took in a breath and placed his fingers on his sign frame's divine transmission device.

"Can you all hear me? With some information and advice from the guard unit, I've put together a basic plan. I will send it to you, but I have something to say as the tactical leader."

Everyone listened.

“I doubt any of you like war. That may just be my naiveté talking, though.”

Those helping the people of Musashi evacuate below the surface heard his voice coming from the loudspeakers on the walls.

“But if you accept that there is value in living life to its fullest, you should find plenty of value in a battlefield where doing anything less will get you killed. I do not know whether you are freely taking part or if you were forced into it, but let’s look at this positively. If you only focus on the value for yourself, war can be wonderful entertainment.”

Others listened while leaving the Musashi and running down various routes with acceleration charms in hand.

“Well, everyone? Have you raised all your death flags? Have you laid all your foreshadowing? Are you prepared to follow through on that foreshadowing? Do you have a friend who will save you when you are in danger? Do you have a name to shout when you despair? Do you have a secret technique to turn everything around at the last second? Do you hold the cheap yet grand belief that you are a hero? And most importantly...”

Everyone listened.

“Do you have somewhere to return to, you cast of characters?”

Everyone nodded.

“Then I’ll explain the plot. I hate stories where nothing happens. I love stories with ups and downs and where everything grows more and more exciting. So...”

Everyone watched the sign frames opened near their faces. The route for them to take from the Musashi appeared on the battlefield maps there.

“ ... ”

Neshinbara removed his finger from the sign frame in front of him.

He had just finished drawing the route with his index finger.

“It’s a straight line.” He took a breath. “This will be a group battle fighting over the control of the battlefield, but it will also be an individual battle

between the heroes who try to destroy the other side's control or protect their own side's control. And this battle will also include powerful machines such as mechanical dragons or Gods of War. The powerful nations of K.P.A. Italia and Tres España have prepared a sturdy formation, great heroes, aerial ships, and Gods of War. If we can destroy them, take back Horizon Ariadust, and secure the Logismoí Óplo, every nation will be forced to focus on the real power the disarmed Musashi possesses."

Now...

"Will you be going, you cast of characters? Go for the sake of my book of ideas rather than that boring history book known as the Testament. You only have to rescue the heroine and we'll reach our happy ending. Just head forward without hesitation, create an exciting story, and pave the path to the sequel. And how about you say something, protagonist?"

"Protagonist, hm?"

A group stopped near the exit from the western mountain pass muttered to themselves.

They were just another hundred meters from the barrier forming the exit from the mountain pass. The western plain was just on the other side. The barrier's gate was open, three aerial warships were floating in the sky on the southern end of the plain, and closely-packed soldiers were visible below those ships.

That was the Tercio formation.

The students of K.P.A. Italia and Tres España formed a group of a thousand. The students in front wore black uniforms and the ones in back wore vermillion uniforms, so there was a clear divide of color despite being so closely packed. The center was colored vermillion and the left and right were black.

The main unit of pikemen was surrounded by musketeers and larger musket units were gathered at the four corners.

The Musashi students viewing them from a distance were the combat members which primarily meant the guard unit. Tenzou was there, Noriki was

there, Adele was there, and Persona-kun was there.

However...

“What a pain,” said Adele next to Tenzou. “We have about two hundred, but they have five times that. They predicted that we would use a concentrated attack to open a path.”

She wore thick armor and Tenzou turned toward her.

“Adele-dono, I had never seen your mobile shell before. ...It is very thickly armored.”

“Unlike the high-speed assault units popular these days, this is a heavy armor unit based on an extremely old type. The engine is made so it can only walk. My father left it for me, but it’s so hard to use that this is my first actual battle in it. I apologize in advance for any problems.”

Everyone lowered their head at that last comment.

“If only Naomasa and Mitotsudaira were here,” sighed Noriki.

“This is out of range for the God of War and Mitotsudaira-dono said she had to prepare for later. ...Also, I don’t think even Mitotsudaira-dono could handle this head on.”

Tenzou looked at the Tercio formation. The musketeers were already holding up their guns. The pike units at the front of the main unit were starting to produce white glowing cross-style shields measuring two meters square.

“Those are the Catholic impact-and slash-resistant spell shields. The musketeer club sometimes fires on those during after-school practice, but they’re really, really hard to break through.”

“I see,” said everyone in the guard unit. They all checked the various types of armor they wore. “Well, leave this to us. We may not be able to form as tightly packed a formation, but our smaller numbers give us greater mobility. We can accomplish something as a diversion. The rest of you should refrain from fighting until you reach the land port.”

“But...”

Tenzou’s worried comment produced a laugh from the second in command.

“This is far better than fighting fellow Far Easterners on someone else’s command.”

As he said that, Noriki spoke up while standing casually.

“Where is the protagonist that Neshinbara mentioned?”

Hearing his quiet voice, everyone exchanged a glance.

They all suddenly realized Toori was indeed missing. But that was why they all looked in a certain direction. They turned toward the 100 meter wide valley known as the western plain.

“Ah.”

He was there. Toori defenselessly passed through the barrier gate, stopped, and turned toward the rest of the group.

“C’mon, what’re you doing? Hurry it up. They’re waiting for us over there.”

“Waaaah! What are you talking about!? And why are you going on ahead!?”

“What do you mean ‘why’? That’s where we’re headed. Why are you all hiding?”

Toori pointed toward the Tercio formation about three hundred meters away where all of the enemy soldiers were exchanging a glance. They all looked to the commanders of their respective units. And before long...

“F-fire!?”

Just as a trumpet sounded and a volley of gunfire began, the aerial ships began firing from the air.

Those loud noises indicated the start of the battle.

Chapter 36: Communicator between Two People

CHAPTER 36

"Communicator between Two People"



What kind of communication
Can be achieved in a fistfight?
Point Allocation (New Sensation)

What kind of communication

Can be achieved in a fistfight?

Point Allocation (New Sensation)

The battlefield began to move.

Voices shook the air and footsteps shook the earth.

Gunshots rang out, smoke scattered through the air, and those who were hit fell to the ground.

Some moved out of the way of the collapsing people, some continued forward, but no one stayed still.

In the western plain, the Musashi forces split into two groups: a small formation mostly composed of Musashi's guard unit and a scattered diversion unit led by Tenzou. Those two groups began to battle the Tercio.

Musashi's formation started toward the front left of the Tercio. They were targeting the seam between the corner musket unit and the primary pike unit. They lowered down, activated their defensive charms, and advanced along a zigzag route.

However, the amount of Blessings given to the charms decreased each time they purified the speed of the enemy bullets. Each student had about five charms, but that was not enough.

"Don't fully rely on your charms! Lower down, bring any bulletproof armor to the front, and spread out!"

While lowering down to the point of almost falling over, they advanced. And they were supported by Tenzou's diversion unit.

Tenzou and the others move in an arc along the front and center of the Tercio and they repeatedly approached and fell back. They threw weapons such as kunai and quickly fired small bows as they moved. They were not expecting their attacks to accomplish anything. They were merely meant to prevent the column at the front of the Tercio from focusing.

But all they were doing was approaching and creating a diversion.

They were not eliminating their enemies.

Musashi's guard unit was primarily equipped with spears and swords, so they could only fight once they approached.

“— — —”

As one student took too long swapping out charms, he was shot in the right shoulder and blown backwards.

Someone clicked their tongue toward the enemy, tossed an activated charm toward the collapsed student, and continued forward.

They could only continue on.

Meanwhile, Tenzou and his dozen or so companions fell back while throwing kunai. They could hear the bullets flying through the air nearby.

“Do not fall back too far!” said Tenzou.

An enemy ship was visible overhead. The giant ship waited above the Tercio formation. It was intended to handle any transport ships sent from the Musashi, but it was equipped with cannons that could fire down on the ground.

“Go too far and that will fire on us!”

Tenzou glanced back toward the barrier at the entrance to the western mountain pass. The gate was destroyed.

It had been fired on the instant Toori had been spotted. They had frantically charged into the western plain and avoided the danger.

...But they were not trying to hit us. They were trying to destroy the barrier behind us.

That would prevent any reinforcements from arriving through the mountain pass and cut off their escape route.

The enemy was attempting to completely destroy them. If a knight or God of War showed up now, the enemy likely thought they could restrain them with defensive spells.

They were sure of their victory. As such, K.P.A. Italia and Tres España's Broadcast Committees were likely broadcasting the situation to the world.

...And then there is our situation.

The Musashi could not move as it secured the energy needed to depart. It was an unpleasant period of time. The transport ships accompanying the Musashi were also immobilized while the enemy aerial ships were targeting the Musashi.

Every nation in the world would be watching that scene. The Musashi could do nothing due to its size and it was faced with the closely-packed formation that the nations of Europe were still using.

...It is a solid formation and a terrible match for us!

It could be worn down bit by bit using long-distance attacks, but the Far East avoided possession of firearms due to their required disarmament. Bows were allowed for sports, but firearms were only allowed for the clans or forces with legitimate historical reasons.

The Matsudaira clan was allowed the possession of firearms, but it was not enough to put together an official unit.

And so they needed to get close. If they could not, there was nothing they could do.

That was why Tenzou supported the Musashi formation that included Toori. He threw kunai, drew the aim of the enemies targeting the others' defenses, and watched as his fellow students were shot.

"...!"

The formation approached within one hundred meters. They only had one option.

"Go!"

They all cried out as the head of the formation crossed the hundred meter line.

In that instant, Tenzou saw the enemies take a sudden action.

With the sudden sound of a trumpet, the Tercio slowly but surely began to move.

“...!!”

They fell back.

As he heard the rumbling of their footsteps, the Tercio most definitely moved away.

They did not move far.

But the entire formation moved far enough to bring something else to the forefront: a cannon.

“!?”

As Tenzou watched, a great noise rushed toward Toori and the rest of the charging Musashi formation.

The cannon fired from only one hundred meters away.

All but one of the people making up Musashi’s formation reacted in time. The second-in-command and the rest of the guard unit got down on the ground as they had been trained to do, Toori had his head held down by Noriki, and Persona-kun frantically leaped to the side after seeing everyone else’s reactions.

But...

“Eh? Ah? What is everyone doing? Huh?”

As Adele arrived at the very back in her mobile shell, she saw everyone else getting down on the ground.

“What? Are you...sliding?”

Just as she looked forward, the cannon hit her head-on.

A metallic noise reverberated throughout the western plain and into the sky.

An instant later, everyone there heard Adele’s voice.

“Owww!”

It was a scream that could not exactly be called a scream.

But the Musashi group on the ground and the Tercio's soldiers all looked toward the mobile shell whose waist had fallen to the ground.

"...It's okay?"

Even if it was a field cannon, it was made to destroy barricades, buildings, and rock walls.

Rather than a bullet or cannonball, it used a smooth shell with a streamlined front end.

It used a normal Testamento Firma charm to fire the shell with compressed air and a single charm should have been enough to pierce a twenty centimeter stone wall.

"Ow ow ow ow..."

For a bit, the blue mobile shell shook its helm back and forth as it trembled from the impact.

"Ow... What is wrong with you!? Why would you fire a cannon at someone out of the blue like that!?"

Inside the helm, Adele's glasses had partially slipped from her face, her bangs were in disarray, and a bit of snot dripped down her tearful face. However, her tears were more from surprise than pain.

"Th-that's dangerous! I can't believe you!"

The first to react to her protests were those in the Tercio.

"A heavily armored vassal?" said the commander next to the cannon. "How outdated can you get!?"

The confusion remained on his face as he gave direct instructions to the student operating the cannon. Three charms were loaded into it. After some hesitation, a fourth was loaded.

"Eh? Um, uh... Owwww!!"

With a great roar, the second shot hit as well. The intense sound of impact filled the air and sparks flew.

“W-wah! Th-that scared me! It really, really scared me!”

As she shouted, the shell spun through the air and fell into the small mountain forest to the east.

Meanwhile, Toori opened a sign frame.

“Neshinbara, Adele’s looking pretty invincible here. Any idea what’s going on?”

On the bow of Musashino, Neshinbara tilted his head at Toori’s question.

“I’m not sure. Normally, a direct hit would do a lot of damage.”

But someone else was watching him from a short distance.

Yoshinao sat at a table as he listened to the battle reports.

He recalled what Adele had said earlier.

“Come to think of it...”

...There was a vassal with a rather old mobile shell in our territory.

The man had referred to himself as the Eternal Vassal and his vassal family had long protected that territory surrounded by Tres España and Hexagone Française.

...He supposedly protected that territory even when there were no knights.

Constantly modifying the mobile shell to handle any kind of enemy had led to a certain result.

“It is nothing but heavy armor to act as a wall.”

Thick armor that could repel any attack was given the mobility of a mobile shell so that it could just barely move.

It was not all that useful on the battlefield. If it could not move, one could simply ignore it or get close and attack at a weak point. Modern battlefields focused on mobility and modern mobile shells could fly and charge at the enemy ranks. This old-style mobile shell focused on defense so much that it could only walk and could barely move its arms, so it could not keep up with the

speed of the battlefield.

Even when protecting a castle or city, the individual defensive power of a vassal or knight was not as important as the spell defenses of the castle or city as a whole.

Due to a need to protect, that obsolete device had not been thrown out and had been further specialized as the generations went on. The result had been the Eternal Vassal's mobile shell.

The girl named Adele had said her father had given her the shell. In that case, the design principle would be the same: it could not move at all, but it could protect.

...And it is also a feminine model. How very interesting.

Feminine mobile shells tended to be given feminine body lines and shorter heights. Its ability to deflect enemy attacks, especially those from the front, would be greater than that of her father's generation.

Up front, Neshinbara tilted his head.

"Knight and vassal armor has been mass-produced lately, but they used to be custom made. To be honest, I don't really understand this, but I think the era has come full circle."

"What do you mean?" asked Tenzou.

"This extremely heavy armor design was made to block any kind of shell back in an age before everything became so high-speed, but that same design has suddenly become useful again. Of course, something that cannot move will not be useful as a fighter in the modern high-speed and high-mobility battlefield."

"But it can function as a wall."

"A-a wall?" asked Adele. "What do you mean by that!?"

Yoshinao laughed.

"Honey, what has you so happy?"

"Nothing," he replied to his wife. He straightened his back and returned his expression to normal. "We must not say we are happy. Not while Musashi's

representatives are fighting!!”

As Adele staggered from the second hit, she was half in tears.

...I-I have to persevere! You withstood it. You put in a good effort. You did well. Good job.

While praising herself, she stood firm.

Her father had often said that perseverance was an important job of a vassal.

When she had heard that, she had assumed he meant it could be hard to go along with what one’s knight superiors said.

...I-I never thought he meant physical perseverance!!

She then realized that the others had vanished. *Huh?* she wondered while unsteadily looking around.

“Why are you all behind me?”

“C’mon, don’t worry about it, Adele! We’re all supporting you!”

“Oh, thank you for that kind of moral support... Wait. Don’t tell me that support is also physic-Oww! A-a third shot!? Ow ow ow ow ow ow ow ow!”

“Bow wow wow wow wow! Are you a dog or something? Anyway, that’s amazing. You’re getting hit pretty good, but you still deflect it. You’re like a God of War.”

“N-no, the armor is being worn down quite a bit! The upper armor will be destroyed after another twenty shots!”

The estimate of twenty put a grimace on the faces of the Tercio students.

Huh? thought Adele as the others began whispering behind her.

She had a bad feeling about where this was headed. She tilted her helmet in suspicion and saw Persona-kun peering at her.

...Oh, come to think of it, we’re helmet brothers right now.

“Um, Persona-kun? Why are you looking at me like that? Oh, and sorry, but why are you, uh, putting away the nail-covered bat you took from your personal

armory? You're lifting me up from behind? Um, uh... a shield? You're using me as a shield, aren't you!?"

As she was lifted into the air and pointed toward the Tercio, she heard Toori's voice behind her.

"Okay, Pe-yan can handle the mobility, so don't worry about being so slow, Adele. Your value lies in something other than speed right now."

"Ah! That was actually pretty good! ...Um, why are you running forward? Wait! They have two cannons now! They've doubled their motivation and...uh... I'm a pacifist, so...don't shoot! L-look, I can't protect myself right now!! I can't resist!"

A short moment passed.

"Owww!!!"

But something drowned out her shout.

The aerial ship floating overhead suddenly began to fire.

"!?"

The many noises and shaking of the air were pointed north.

"Are they trying to keep the Musashi from sending anything here!?"

As they all groaned worriedly, "Musashi's" voice came via divine transmission.

"Do not worry." She took in a breath and regulated her breathing. "We will stop this bombardment. Over."

That statement was followed by intense noises coming from the direction of the Musashi.

The sounds of fired shells led to repeated sounds of impact in the air above the starboard side and center of the Musashi.

But they were not the sounds of the ship being hit. They were the sounds of the shells fired by Tres España's guard ship being deflected above the ship.

Clear sounds rang out, sparks flew, and the shells fell after either shattering or being crushed. Newly created gravitational barriers stopped a few of the falling fragments and lowered their speed.

Those barriers were being operated by a maid standing on Musashino's bridge.

It was "Musashi".

She was as expressionless as ever.

"The academy rules say only a student may confront a student, but they likely intend to interpret the shells falling on the city as 'stray shots'. Over."

She spread her arms in the air and controlled the production of gravitational barriers.

She stopped the shells.

Noise filled the air and sparks scattered.

As multiple shells arrived at high speed, she moved her fingers as if playing a keyboard.

And "Musashi" was not the only one intercepting the shells. Several figures stood on the derrick masts of Shinagawa, the first starboard ship.

"That must be the Musashi Ariadust Academy archery club and the others with sharpshooting spells. Over."

They used a standard method for anti-air interception.

They would first target the shells so they could be tracked and intercepted.

To do this, those on the second mast from the front spread spell curtains over the dangerous airspace the shells would pass through on their path to the ship. Over a wide space in the air, three vertical and four horizontal curtains of light were created. They came from a spell that would track any shell that passed through them.

Next, the different firing squads atop the masts at the back of the ship were tasked with different expanded frames. They were to shoot down any shells that passed through those frames.

Lastly, any missed shells, ones considered dangerous despite passing outside the frames, or ones that were not wholly destroyed, would be handled by “Musashi”.

The students’ voices were audible in the sky.

“Fire!”

All of them had been too nervous to fight on the front lines. In fact, most of the normal students were lacking in combat training and had insufficient physical and mental strength. But even they were able to handle defense or other work on the ships.

“Musashi” looked starboard where the students were intercepting the shells from the masts of Shinagawa.

...I have determined this is most welcome.

They were protecting their own everyday lives and thus the Musashi itself. As such, she had no objection to helping them.

But she received a report just as she caught an attack that slipped through.

“ ‘Musashi’-sama! I have detected a high-energy ether change from the Tres Españan guard ship!” “Asakusa” communicated via a simple sign frame. “It is coming from their main ether cannon! It is 25cm/38 calibers and is spell operated! Over.”

A moment later, light burst from the southwestern sky.

Those in the western plain saw the light in the sky.

The Tres Españan guard ship floating in the air – a frigate – fired the light that demonstrated it was a warship. The light came from an ether cannon that transformed ether into “destruction” and fired it along with a shell.

With a noise like the sky being torn in two and a massive explosion of steam, the beam of light shot toward the Musashi.

That light flew in a curving trajectory as if it had been thrown. Unlike a normal cannon, this ether cannon could be given various effects via spell manipulation.

Homing shots and mid-flight directional changes were entirely possible.

The light continued stabbing through the sky even after enveloping two of the tracking curtains of light deployed by the students.

It maintained its energy and flew over Musashino to reach Okutama.

“Musashi” made an instantaneous decision as the ether-enveloped shell arrived. She repeatedly opened gravitational barriers in the air.

“...!!”

An ensemble of crashing, bursting, and shattering sounds was created.

The gravitational barriers were destroyed and the last one ultimately shattered.

“!”

But the ether shell’s trajectory altered slightly so it passed just barely above Okutama.

While leaving a burned color in the air behind it, the light struck the mountains beyond.

With a great roar, the mountain was destroyed down to the roots of the trees over several dozen meters.

“Musashi” did not turn back toward the uprooted trees or the dirt and sand rising like smoke.

She silently remained on guard while “Asakusa” spoke from the sign frame.

“ ‘Musashi’-sama! Well done! Over.”

“No, that was due to their poor aim. They must not be able to see us at the base of the mountain. I have determined the next shot will be a direct hit. However...”

A pale light was visible in the southwestern sky. The ether cannon was preparing its second shot.

It was going to fire.

The second shot would fly in a chopping trajectory that would certainly hit Okutama.

Once it was fired, there was no chance of avoiding it or deflecting it.

But “Musashi” turned forward toward a girl standing on the front mast of Shinagawa.

She wore a white and red outfit with a red binder skirt on either side of her waist.

“Asama-sama. Please handle this. Over.”

“Okay,” said Asama over divine transmission. “The Asama Shrine will use its power to protect the Musashi.”

With the evening sky behind her, a figure in red and white stood in an elevated place.

This was Shinagawa, the first starboard ship of Musashi. The one standing atop the first derrick mast with her black hair whipping in the wind was Asama.

To avoid air resistance, the top of the mast was shaped like the cross-section of a leaf. Her left and right binder skirt, which functioned as a shrine maiden’s red hakama, expanded.

The process only took an instant. Each piece of the skirt’s hem moved and the tips displayed torii-shaped emblems. As those emblems displayed, each binder fixed her position in space and stopped moving.

Then the picks on either side of her white and red shoes drove in the floor. As soon as they did, the two tail binders stretching from the back of her waist *auspuffed* a shimmering of heat.

Hanami danced lightly atop her shoulder and spoke.

“Position purification complete.”

“Thanks. ...Now, then.”

Asama’s next action was a well-practiced one.

She pulled two bows from behind her waist. After lining them up left and

right, she raised them in front of her.

She removed the left bow's string from the top and bottom and removed the right bow's string only on the bottom. She then grabbed and pulled the string hanging down from the right bow and attached it to the bowstring reel at the bottom of the left bow.

This attached the left and right bows together top and bottom. The right one was on top and the left on bottom.

“Shirasago Enterprises ‘Umetsubaki’.”

The wrist of the gauntlet covering her left arm had a hole on the thumb side and the little finger side. She stuck a bow into each hole and fixed them in place.

“Connected.”



With the two bows connected vertically, she created the single large bow named Umetsubaki.

With a light shake of the wrist, the top and bottom bowstring reels spun and the tautness was automatically tuned.

It was finished in an instant.

Asama's actions seemed casual or natural as she held up the large bow.

And the arrow she pulled from her back could easily have been called a stake.

She nocked the meter-long stake that was covered in a white outer shell.

She let out a breath and raised the bow to shooting height.

"Nn."

When she took in the next breath, she quickly drew back the arrow.

The sound of the drawn bowstring reached its limit and then stopped.

But that was not all. As Hanami clapped atop her shoulder, she spoke.

"Hanami, I want to purify any impurities on its path that will lower its speed or cause its trajectory to stray, so set it to use two Blessings for five hundred meters."

"Clap."

As Hanami clapped, Umetsubaki began to change. The upper and lower bows began to transform such that the bow portion protruded forward around the original grips.

"..."

The tension increased and the burden on Asama's fingertips and arm increased along with it.

"...!"

She clenched her teeth and raised her eyebrows as she endured it.

She ignored the sweat on her brow while strength gathered in her eyes.

As Umetsubaki formed an upper and lower V shape as if bending in the wind, her green eye looked into the distance.

“Located.”

In that instant, the light arrived.

The beam from the ether cannon arrived before the sound did.

But even as that light drew near, Asama did not waver. She withstood it all until she heard the metallic noise of Umetsubaki completing its transformation. And at that point...

“!!”

She released it.

Umetsubaki’s tension was released as if repelled and both the bow and bowstring split the air. A slicing sound rang out, the great speed created a mist around her, and the mist became a wave decorating her red and white outfit. The mist danced in the wind, Asama’s red and white was visible through it, and it finally vanished like scattering flowers.

By the time she finished her follow-through pose and took a breath, the arrow stake had already reached its target.

“!!”

An immense shattering of light filled the sky.

The ether cannon’s attack was purified and smashed to pieces.

Cheers rose from within and atop the Musashi.

They expressed praise for Asama and relief that their safety was assured.

And two people heard those voices from the sky.

Naito flew above the Musashi on a wooden broom with Naruze riding tandem with her.

She turned toward the Tres Españan guard ship, which did not fire a third shot.

“The Musashi is an aerial city ship, so its defenses are on the level of a fortress city. During its Great Renovation, the Testament Union didn’t allow installation

of anti-air equipment to use against pirates, but they did allow defensive barriers. Shrine spells like Asamachi's are also allowed as long as they are for monster extermination or defense, so we can withstand a fair bit. Of course, it's because they know that that they aren't approaching and are just making sure we can't move."

"That's right."

Naruze looked toward a spot near the bottom surface of the Musashi. On the back of each ship was a spell shaft driver that the engine division used to eject materials. One of those was currently activated.

"Naomasa making a show of preparing to send out her God of War seems to have done the trick. She can also adjust the angle to a certain extent, so a Kraken-class frigate isn't about to fly above us."

"Thanks to that, they've been indecently poking at us like this. What about K.P.A. Italia's white one over there?"

"The Regno Unito is the pope-chancellor's ship, so its weapons have been quiet. Its closer to being a galley and the spell cannon on the front is its main cannon, so it has to face the Musashi to fire on us. It'll probably head out if the Musashi begins to fly."

Meanwhile, the shellfire grew more numerous once more.

Gravitational barriers appeared and disappeared between them and the Musashi. Every time they did, a clear sound raced through the air.

"It feels like having our head forced down. I don't like it."

Naruze used the white pen in her hand to draw on a manuscript crop mark frame floating in the air. A still image of Neshinbara appeared in the top right corner of the frame. She surrounded his face with lines to form a panel. An image of him looking to the side appeared next to it and she surrounded it with a panel as well.

"Neshinbara, how are things there?"

A speech bubble appeared to provide his answer.

"Our preparations are going well. We should be in position soon. Urquiaga-

kun must have nothing else to do because even he's helping out. The work in elevated places is dangerous, so his help is most welcome."

"You make a long storyboard."

Someone then intruded on the line. A panel in a small frame appeared with "Musashi" inside it.

"Naito-sama, Naruze-sama, our sound detection picked up on the engine of a God of War just now. It is the clockwork-conversion engine of the Gods of War made by K.P.A. Italia's *Fino Alba* brand. After the current covering fire, a single craft is likely to attack. Please intercept it as planned. Over."

"That cross-legged guy must be pretty motivated to come here on his own."

Naito gave a small nod.

"We'll have to do something. It would be very bad if it slipped past the gravitational barriers and fired on the surface. After all, the Musashi's living areas are made light and divided into blocks, so they're pretty fragile. And if the people panic, more problems will come. We need to do something, Ga-chan."

Naito's voice had a slight low tone to it.

Meanwhile, a shimmering appeared from the land port.

The red and white four-winged God of War wore aerial combat armored clothing.

"Here it comes, Margot!"

Naito nodded and prepared herself along with Naruze.

She placed her hands together on the wooden broom she rode and pressed her forehead against it as if crouching down. Behind her, Naruze held out the pen in her hand.

"I never thought we would end up fighting Tsirhc as Technohexen."

Naito gave no response.

Naruze smiled while watching her back and raised wings.

"Sorry, Naito. I see us as us, so let's work together, keep living, and show them what we can do." She took a breath. "Technomagie are the spells shared

in secret that cannot be sufficiently studied because the Tsrhc religion fears them, views them as an enemy, and prioritizes their destruction. Musashi has been an excellent hideout.”

As she spoke, they watched the enemy approach and they moved in opposite vertical directions. Naito and her broom moved up into the air. Naruze and her pen threw themselves toward the earth.

“And so there is meaning in exposing our status as Technohexen in order to fight for Musashi’s safety!!”

The two joined voices in the air.

“Verwandlung!”

And with metallic noises, their Technohexen equipment was summoned behind them.

Naruze spread her black wings.

“Weiss Fräulein!!”

Naito spread her gold wings.

“Schwarz Fräulein!!”

Their Technohexen outfits opened like flowers in midair. Naruze’s was white and Naito’s black.

The center of the development was the wooden broom and the pen.

A yellow light flashed in the stone embedded in their respective tools and an alarm sounded.

“Expanding allotted space. Everyone, please be careful.”

White and black witch outfits spread out in midair. They both looked like spiders with their legs spread, but as they expanded, they also looked like butterflies or birds. They quickly wrapped around the two of them.

At the same time, their current uniforms carried out an automatic hard point disrobing.

A field built into the witch outfit expansion process removed and stored the uniforms. The space opened by the summoning stored the uniforms and removed or filled in the unnecessary empty space.

Their skin was exposed for just an instant. The very next moment, the white and black inner suits forming the foundation of the witch outfits had wrapped tightly around their bodies.

The inner suits had a simple shape, so there was almost no difference in their coloration at this point.

But that quickly changed.

The hard point parts which acted as base points for equipment and fixed the inner suits in place attached around their necks, on the sides of their chests, and on the sides of their waists. They were all rectangular or square, but black-winged Naruze's were white and gold-winged Naito's were black.

Each part contained the Edel Brocken emblem and either the words "Weiss Fräulein" or the words "Schwarz Fräulein".

White and black waves then raced around the two of them. The wind flipped up the skirt, stole, and other parts of their witch outfits. As all those attached to the hard point parts, they both spoke.

"Come out, Schwarz Fräulein!"

"Come on, Weiss Fräulein!"

Steel parts appeared around the broom and pen they held up.

These were the Verstärken Schale for Technohexen equipment.

The brush portion of Naito's broom was surrounded by a vernier nozzle and the rest was wrapped in a long and narrow ship's hull.

Meanwhile, Naruze's pen was surrounded by a long spear-like collection of parts.

Bolts were fired into the air to fix all the parts into place.

The rest finished in a series of instants.

They were both wrapped in black and white witch outfits, Naito was given a

black three-cornered hat, and Naruze was given a white bonnet.

The bolts assembled the specialized Verstärken Schale around their respective tools.

With metallic noises, white and black ether light ran through the air and the joints to complete the process.

Gold-winged Naito held a narrow ship-like wooden broom as a Schwarz Hexen.

Black-winged Naruze held a long spear-like pen as a Weiss Hexen.

The two Technohexen exchanged a glance.

“Right!”

They both straddled their weapons and looked up into the sky.

“Draw some speed, Weiss Fräulein!”

“Accelerate, Schwarz Fräulein!!”

The two of them raced into the sky to pursue the flying God of War.

A giant white ship had the emblem of K.P.A. Italia on the side.

It was Regno Unito. On the bow, which was shaped much like a rectangle, a table had been set up and a man in a white cloak sat at it.

He wrote a letter without listening to the steel noises from the north or looking toward the ships producing them. He was writing to the kings and chancellors of various lands and other influential people with an interest in Catholicism. He signed one of them as he spoke to himself.

“ ‘I hope to eventually visit you up north.’ ...I really am terrible at polite language.”

Innocentius finally looked up into the sky dyed with the colors of evening.

“What is going on, hm?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the female student underneath the nearby tent.

She appeared from next to the desk covered in divine transmission

equipment because an upperclassman pushed her out.

“A first year? What city’s academy are you from? I can’t believe they would send someone like you to the front lines.”

“Oh, I, um, your holiness... Genova.”

The girl standing between him and the divine transmission desk seemed to wither before him, so he spoke with no change of expression.

“It doesn’t matter here that Genova tried to get rich by using Sion non-humans escaped from Tres España as financial agents. We are here as K.P.A. Italia and thus a representative of the Testament Union. Also, it was thanks to cities like yours and Lombardia that we avoided the hell of debt that Tres España has found themselves in.”

“Y-you do not have a problem with Genova?”

“As long as you keep it to the foreigners or stay within what is allowed to recreate the Testament descriptions. Any Catholic that goes beyond that will be punished. I do understand the meaning of money.”

Innocentius emphasized his last statement which seemed to relieve the girl because she gave a small sigh and approached.

She produced a *senicale fiamma*.

“Tres España’s God of War has engaged Musashi’s Technohexen in combat above the Musashi. The three Tres Españan guard ships in the western plain are firing on the Musashi while receiving backup from the supply ships.”

“Given that they still have to return home, they’re lucky they can send out that many main ships and supply ships. How are they doing?”

“The three ships are fixed in place to provide the concentrated firepower needed to shoot down any of Musashi’s transport ships before they can reach the western plain. They are currently firing on the Musashi’s three starboard ships and two central ships. The bombardment is also reaching the farthest back port ship, but...”

“The Musashi’s front port ship is a cargo ship, isn’t it? Could they send a transport ship from there?”

“Testament,” replied the female student. “Their two front ships, Asakusa and Shinagawa, are cargo ships, but a mountain exists between them and us. They would need to fly over that mountain to send a transport ship here.”

“But our ships could fire on them as they did? I went to check the barrier to the eastern mountain path today, but the valley wasn’t wide enough for a ship to fly here while hiding behind the mountain.”

“Testament. We have decided the port side poses no threat. And it seems the ground unit has clashed with the unit containing Musashi’s chancellor.”

“Clashed? Taking this slow, are they? Tell the special duty officers in charge to crush them.”

“Oh, y-yes.”

“Testament.”

“Oh, Testament. Sorry.”

“Very good. Now hurry. What are those special duty officers doing? The strong are not supposed to gradually injure the weak until they eventually collapse. The strong crush them in an instant with immeasurable power.” He took a breath. “Crush them right this instant.”

In the western plain, the charge continued with Adele at the head.

The Tercio students saw them running forward.

“...!?”

They began to back away, but it was too late.

The charge approached the left side of the Tercio, at the edge of the pike unit surrounding the musketeers. They were targeting the gap between the different units. Approaching there meant being fired on from the front of the Tercio and from the musket unit at the left corner.

“Go!”

But Musashi’s formation split into small groups. First, it was a group of ten.

“Go, us!”

That group split into two columns and ran.

As they ran forward, those in front would let the bullets hit until their charms had been consumed to a certain extent. They then circled to the back. This rotation allowed them to maintain their speed.

The enemy hurriedly took aim.

“...!!”

But another group of ten split off after a short pause and ran as if pursuing the leading two columns.

A moment later, a new group of ten split off. They all took different routes, but their destination was narrowed down to a single point.

As they split into several groups at such close range, the front line of enemy musketeers was unsure where to aim. The commanders of the enemy platoons used their swords to point out the group for that platoon to target, but Musashi's students were lighter and quicker than before.

The musketeers could not immediately target them and the gap between them shrank.

“Ohhh!”

The leading members of Musashi's guard unit held their defensive charms in their left hand and their spears in their right.

As they continued forward, they noticed a sudden movement.

A trumpet blasted from within the Tercio and the earth rumbled.

And then everyone on Musashi's side saw the Tercio rapidly fall back despite being so closely-packed.

Tenzou saw it happen as he continued his diversion at a distance.

The Tercio rapidly retreated.

“No! This is just a trick to make it look like they are!!”

The Tercio moved in his vision, but they were not simply moving away.

The Tercio was splitting in two. One group fell back while the other advanced.

...Is this...?

As a group, that sort of closely-packed formation was highly defensive and kept losses to a minimum, but they lacked mobility.

However, that meant high-level orders were not needed and warriors with little training could be used.

And as a major formation often used in training, the Tercio was a simple way of gaining a consensus in a group containing warriors from both Tres España and K.P.A. Italia.

Tenzou had assumed that was the purpose behind the Tercio.

...I was wrong!

It was a simple matter. The enemy had split the Tercio between the Tres España unit and the K.P.A. Italia unit. K.P.A. Italia had moved left and right while Tres España remained in the center.

On top of that, the enemy divided their chain of command in three.

Rather than moving the entire giant formation, they would split apart when needed.

They were three phalanx-like formations that had merely taken the overall form of a Tercio.

And due to the division by academy, they could quickly and surely create the split.

The left edge unit that Toori's group was charging toward had split off and fallen back, but they were replaced by two units that came forward from the right.

Rather than simply falling back, two units moved forward to fill the gap.

"Toori-dono! They are coming from the side!!"

At the sound of a trumpet, the two advancing units turned ninety degrees to the right and faced Toori's group.

Toori's group was obstructed by the retreating formation to the front and

now had great pressure from the side.

And...

“!?”

Bullets flew toward them. But rather than from the legion in front, it came from the western mountain to the right.

“It can’t be,” said someone as everyone turned toward the western mountain.

Lines of red uniforms could be seen descending the slope with spears and guns in hand.

They slowly yet surely approached the western plain from the tree-filled slope.

“Did they come from the ship up above!?”

They must have traveled in small groups through the forest from behind so that the Musashi group could not see. It had taken time, but it was proving extremely effective. They were already forming ranks between the trees and they were clearly attempting to drive the diversion unit toward the eastern slope where Toori’s group was.

“Kh!”

Tenzou raised a hand and waved to the east. He was instructing his diversion unit to retreat and regroup with Toori’s group to the east.

The battlefield was beginning to corner Toori’s group.

They were on the verge of being crushed.

Chapter 37: Those Travelling Through the Blue Sky

CHAPTER 37

"Those Travelling Through the Blue Sky"



Who are those that move above
While seeming to embrace?
Point Allocation (Air Superiority)

Who are those that move above

While seeming to embrace?

Point Allocation (Air Superiority)

A battle had begun in the air above the Musashi.

Two sets of wings struggled against Tres España's aerial mobility-enabled God of War.

The wings were white and black, but their clothes and flight equipment were the opposite colors.

The two sets of wings accelerated, stopped, reversed direction as if struck, and sometimes flew in an arc to evade.

The two sets of six wings were only used for midair attitude control. Their speed was supplied by the cowling-covered broom and pen they rode as if clinging to.

They flew at high speed using those white and black accelerators that used Technomagie.

Black light burst from the nozzle covering the broom's brush.

Several crop mark frames and a white line stabbing through them came from the tip of the pen.

They both moved about with enough speed to keep up with the God of War.

And it was all accomplished using Technomagie, the power of a Technohexen.

One was Weiss Techno and the other was Schwarz Techno.

Some basic Technomagie was common to both types, but Weiss Techno primarily created and restored things. It generally worked in the positive direction to aid the user.

On the other hand, Schwarz Techno primarily eliminated and decayed things. It generally worked in the negative direction and did not aid the user.

Originally, there had been no distinction. If the user harmed others or used it

for their own benefit, it was considered Schwarz. Otherwise, it was considered Weiss. But once the witch hunt began and both sides were persecuted, the Technohexen classified the spells as either Weiss or Schwarz to make the techniques simpler and easier to pass on. The division between positive and negative increased the speed of understanding and systematized the learning process. This lessened the all-encompassing power of Technomagie, but it also allowed the Technohexen techniques to survive.

Thus, the flying pair of white and black had similar and different aspects.

The white Technohexen flew using the acceleration that the pen tip drew in the air. The black one flew using the repelling force of the negative gravity produced from the brush of the wooden broom.

The black one had spells to reduce the acceleration resistance, so she was slightly faster. The white one could control what she drew, so she could make tighter turns.

But as they competed between speed and mobility, the battle required the unilateral use of power. While the God of War fired repeatedly with its rifle, the white and black sets of wings prepared their own weapon.

“...!”

They both produced coins from the handheld safes they used for their legitimate transportation business.

The white one drew an arrow in the crop frame style magic circle opened around her and she placed a silver coin in it.

The black one accelerated a copper coin by passing it through the speedometer style magic circle opened around her.

When the coins were loaded in, the spell reached them and they became bullets that wore down the God of War’s armor and sent sparks flying.

“But this isn’t enough to break through!!” shouted the white Technohexen.

Naruze clenched her teeth, but it was only partially to withstand the inertial forces.

...This pisses me off!

Each of those shots would have been a considerable blow against a human, but they had only scratched the God of War's armor at best. Naito lined up next to her for a moment and flapped her gold wings.

"I wish we had a decent attack spell, but we're only allowed crime-fighting and self-defense spells in Musashi!"

"Can we increase the pressure by upping the amount of *auspuff*!?"

"That thing is too fast!"

Naruze knew Naito was right. Their only combat training was the technique training against those in the land port with flight abilities, but that focused on tight turns and how many times one could accelerate in quick succession. Musashi had no aerial combat Gods of War, so the only combat-related training was against people.

Everyone had their different modified accelerators and reinforced parts to increase their flight ability, but a God of War vastly outclassed them in both size and continued acceleration. The most they had were lessons and second-hand image training from former God of War pilots.

...But a real one is completely different!

Weiss Fräulein and Schwarz Fräulein were the previous year's fastest *schale* on the market from the Technohexen brand of Edel Brocken. As the Thirty Years' War approached, Technohexen began to be persecuted as a scapegoat for the people's unease; the Fräulein series had supposedly been created as a means of resisting that. Because they were sold on the market and because they had been bought by Musashi residents, their weapons and equipment which could be directly used as such had been omitted; but that had made them lighter. With a few modifications they had requested of Musashi's transportation specialists, the individual devices had straight-line speeds approaching those of a God of War.

"But we can only just barely take one on while working together!" shouted Naruze as she thought.

...Still...

The lessons and training from the former God of War pilots were paying off with their practical skills.

Ignoring speed and mobility, they would have been immediately shot down if they had not experienced the practiced movements of a warrior during their training.

Also, their countless times using spell-modified airspace to fly full speed, raised ability attacks, and competition between the two had given them the experience they needed to put up with the inertial forces and reckless turns they were making.

...We even developed spells to ensure the inertia doesn't ruin our looks!

That data was sent back to Edel Brocken and Edel Brocken would send them products making use of that data or equipment created specifically for them. Edel Brocken was a gathering of Technohexen and those who had been kicked out of normal aviation jobs, and it seemed the Musashi was a good spot for showing off their products; so Weiss Fräulein and Schwarz Fräulein contained quite a few components designed specifically for Naruze and Naito.

Needless to say, their opponent was no different.

To achieve air superiority, each academy needed to defend against unilateral attacks from the sky. God of War pilots, especially those who used the few aerial combat models, were elites who understood their actions were directly linked to defending their nation.

Rumor had it that those charged with monitoring and guarding the Musashi were promising pilots who would use that duty to learn about the state of other nations, grow familiar with the sky, and ultimately become the elites who would protect their own nations.

“These are the people who monitor the Musashi with only a few Gods of War,” shouted Naruze while rapidly braking and turning to avoid enemy fire. “But we’re representatives of Musashi!!”

Three trajectories cut through the evening sky that was growing red.

In the span of a breath, sharp turns caused wings to creak and hair to whip about. Attacks continued to fly, but the hits were meaningless.

The enemy was closing in on the Technohexen, but their attacks were having no effect.

They nevertheless continued to fire because of the Magie Figur opened before their faces. It displayed a diagram of the enemy God of War from different angles and its weak points were highlighted. The indicators on the sight devices of its face, the base of its wings, the gaps between its sides and chest, *etc.* were linked to the targeting Magie Figur also floating before their faces.

If they brought the God of War into view and remained within firing range, they only had to watch. The targeting Magie Figur would select the closest weak point to their sight and make a decision after a short period of hesitation.

The black Technohexen took a nearly right angle turn and charged in.

The accelerator broom inscribed with the name Schwarz Fräulein did not eliminate the shaking produced by the black reactionary acceleration light.

The God of War attempted to shake her from its tail, but the black Technohexen would not allow it. She leaned forward while clenching the pressure-sensitive grip protruding from the bottom of the *schale* to squeeze the accelerator.

“...!!”

Schwarz Fräulein lurched but then its front end forcefully pointed in a different direction.

The nozzle surrounding the brush fired black light directly backwards.

“Here I go!!”

With that shout, Schwarz Fräulein sent all its trembling forward and moved.

The black Technohexen caught up. The shaking and air pressure caused her hair to wave about and she circled around to the God of War's side as if being reeled in.

“Found it!!”

The black sign frame emitted a voice.

“Targeting complete.”

“Four shots!”

Just as she said, four speedometer style Magie Figur appeared and black copper coin bullets were accelerated from them.

The needles of the meters rotated and the small bullets were instantly given speed too great to be seen.

At the same time, a few numbers appeared in the Magie Figur.

“Margot! How much!?”

“Bullets are 72! Flight time is...6 minutes!”

Without checking to see if she hit, the black Technohexen turned to the right. She braked.

Enemy bullets made of green light shot through the spot she had been in a moment before.

As the God of War held up its rifle as if stroking it, several pieces of paper scattered from it and the bullets pursued the black Technohexen. Meanwhile, the Technohexen’s copper coin bullets flew toward its face, but they hit the armor resembling the brim of a hat and merely sent out four bursts of sparks.

And...

“...!!”

To avoid being defenseless while firing, the God of War swung its wings and rotated to the left.

As the black Technohexen tried to circle behind it, it rotated to follow and it tried to fire in the Technohexen’s path. But the white Technohexen arrived from down and to the right as if trying to cover its entire body.

She had already fired four silver coin bullets in the same trajectory as an uppercut.

She was targeting the bottom of the chin. Even among a God of War’s

movable parts, that spot had especially soft and thin armor.

The God of War was turning to the left, so it could not simply evade to the left or right. And even if it used its wings to escape upwards, the arrows of light would pursue it like an uppercut from below.

“I have you now!!”

In the instant the white Technohexen’s voice entered the air, the God of War took action. Of the four cross-shaped wings on its back, the large top pair rotated 180 degrees and pointed upwards.

They then flapped toward the heavens above.

With an explosion of air, the God of War’s giant form rotated back and to the left.

It spun.

It evaded the silver coins approaching its jaw, so they continued toward the heavens. The white Technohexen followed.

And after completing its rotation, the God of War turned its own gun barrel toward the white Technohexen flying above it.

It flapped its wings again. It swung its legs to perform attitude control, bent backwards, and focused its vision on the black wings and white pen.

But...

“...!”

The God of War had not forgotten about its original opponent.

The black Technohexen had circled to the left, so the God of War faced her, laid its wings on the side, and folded them up as much as possible.

“...!”

It performed a flight attack while prepared to spin.

The attack consumed a large chunk of the tension from the spring device on its back that provided the source of its converted energy. As air was consumed

by the wings, it was built up inside the God of War. The energy obtained from the spring device was added to the compressed wind and it was fired toward the black Technohexen.

It struck.

“!!”

With an intense sound of impact, gold feathers scattered.

“Margot!”

The white Technohexen cried out as her partner was hit.

“...”

And the God of War merely fired on her. It was rotating quite quickly, so its aim was not certain.

And so it fired repeatedly. Testamento Firma charms scattered from its magazine and the wind blew them about like a blizzard.

As expected, the bullets took scattered routes.

“...!!”

But they did their job. One of the bullets smashed into the back of the long pen-shaped staff the white Technohexen frantically held up.

The Technohexen immediately drew anti-shock barriers. A great number of anti-shock barriers.

But they were weak. The crop frame style barriers were all smashed and the staff was destroyed.

The white staff bent and warped until the center burst.

“!”

The rapid loss of speed tossed the white Technohexen into the air while she still held the front end.

Behind her, black feathers scattered and the white staff exploded.

The change in the battle above the Musashi was visible from the western

plain.

The hue of the explosion spreading through the air caused the Musashi side to gasp. Meanwhile, the combined Tres España and K.P.A. Italia unit quickly cornered the Musashi group.

“That settles it!”

Someone let out a shout.

“Those who follow the Testament’s guidance are on the side of justice!!”

As their enemy chanted, the Musashi group was driven to the foot of the mountain on the east side of the western plain.

“Those who follow the Testament’s guidance are on the side of justice!!”

While speaking as if teaching or warning the Musashi group, they readied their pikes and shields and charged in.

They planned to bring the battle to an end.

Back in the sky, the aftermath of the white and black Technohexen’s defeat remained.

But the God of War had not stopped moving. The black Technohexen had yet to be completely shot down.

The explosion of air had knocked her away, but her equipment would be unharmed.

The impact would have put all of her muscles into a reflexive state of shock and she would be unable to control her body, but the God of War’s safety was not ensured until her equipment was destroyed or she was killed.

Without taking a break, the God of War pointed its wings upwards and tipped its upper body down.

It pursued the black Technohexen that fell while clinging to the black broom.

It aimed its rifle barrel and began to flap its cross-shaped wings.

But a voice reverberated from the sky.

“Ma-...”

It came from the heavens the God of War had already turned its back to. The injured Weiss Hexen that had been shot down there was speaking.

Her words were strained and she seemed to spit them out, but her voice still burst through the air.

“Margot! Wake up!!”

At the same time, a sign frame appeared next to both of their faces. It was a torii-style sign frame paid for by the sender.

“Wake up!!”

On Musashino’s deck, the members of Musashi’s internal delivery union had run up the stairs.

A lot of them had been born in different nations and were of different races, but they all looked up into the sky.

“We’ve left Musashi’s skies to you, so we can’t have you not protecting it now! Show me the spirit of the ones who stole the position of Edel Brocken tester from me!”

As if in response, a winged young man spoke to the old man in an old vermillion uniform standing next to him.

“Almirante! You were originally the ace of Tres España’s God of War unit, weren’t you!? Say something!”

“I suppose so,” said the man known as Almirante. He folded his arms. “Listen. I was the first of this group to lose to you two.”

But...

“I’m the strongest of the group, y’know? If you get it, then open your eyes, Zwei Fräulein!”

The God of War saw the black Technohexen’s body shake even as her six gold wings continued to scatter feathers.

“Ah.”

As she opened her mouth, she suddenly swung up her broom.

And she took action.

But aiming the brush toward the God of War required forcing her entire body to move and her face twisted in pain. The previous impact must have rattled her brain because her eyes were not focusing properly.

While still falling, she unsteadily held up the broom's brush and a speedometer type Magie Figur appeared over it. She opened multiple layers of reactionary acceleration Magie Figures to produce an acceleration cannon that created repeated acceleration.

She had not yet loaded a coin bullet. She was planning to expand the spell and raise the power to its limit.

Her lips moved weakly.

“After that, I expand ten acceleration emblems for up to 200 kph with the size at 1/10 of normal, so it will have a consumption of 200 ATELL each.”

She was performing the ATELL consumption calculations needed to construct Technomagie. Rather than calling in a spell as before, she was making a specific incantation to construct the spell for her attack. This was the original activation method for Technomagie.

But the movements of the broom were unsteady and she could not see the God of War. Even if she added a homing ability, it would not be able to home in on the God of War if her initial aim was poor.

But the God of War was not about to let its guard down.

And so it prepared to pull the trigger while making sure not to let its rifle barrel waver.

“...”

And then it noticed something.

It had not noticed earlier due to the red of the setting sun, but there was a light coming from its neck.

It was a narrow line of white light.

That was the light of the drawings made by the white Technohexen. Those drawings produced acceleration.

“!?”

The God of War realized that line had been “drawn” when it rotated backwards to avoid the white Technohexen’s attack. It had rotated as if leaning backwards to let her continue on upwards.

“Ga-chan is a quick drawer, so you couldn’t completely evade,” said the black Technohexen in a trembling voice.

The fading light linked the god of war’s throat to the brush of the black Technohexen’s broom.

Weiss Techno used positive power.

Schwarz Techno used negative power.

What would happen if a negative bullet were placed on that line drawn with positive power?

The negative power would race along the positive power while absorbing it.

“...!”

The light was no longer visible, but the Technohexen loaded the bullets. And these bullets were not just coins.

“Ten 1000 yen rolls of 10 yen copper coins! Go, average daily wage!!”

As soon as the Magie Figur latched onto the loaded coins, the black Technohexen cried out the word that settled the spell calculation.

“Herrlich!”

Once the ten coin bullets were given the power of decay, they were loudly launched.

They used the counter-current of the decaying power to fly along the line of acceleration drawn by the Weiss Hexen. Each type tried to outdo the other in its acceleration as the bullets traveled along.

The God of War swept its hand across in an attempt to defend.

“!”

Two struck its arm, knocking the arm out of the way.

The light drawn by the Weiss Hexen began to vanish, but the bullets had already accurately reached the God of War’s throat.

They stabbed into an area impossible to reach with a bullet that traveled in a perfectly straight line. They struck the border between armor panels that had to be left open so the God of War could move.

The bullets would normally have been completely stopped by the armor.

“Schlag!!”

But the guiding line allowed them to circle around the armor and strike along the same trajectory as a punch.

The impact lasted only an instant, but its effects continued on.

The shock of the impact broke the packaging of the roll of coins and the coins scattered.

A total of 800 shots flew from the right of the God of War’s jaw and into the structure of its head.

The inside was a collection of precise components and a specialized technician was needed to perform maintenance there. The armor’s range of protection was carefully calculated out, so it was normally unthinkable for a high-speed bullet to make its way inside.

But that unthinkable situation was happening now. For the God of War, the situation was similar to having its armor completely ignored as a shotgun was blasted through the jaw and into its head.

A God of War moved by taking the pilot into the cockpit, combining with him, and gaining life. For that reason, each of its parts held the same function and structure as the corresponding part of a human body.

As the scattershot of coins sent an impact directly into the inside of its skull,

the coins struck the inside frame and ricocheted. Each strike bent and transformed them; the bullets smashed the devices used in place of an upper and lower jaw. When some smashed the left hearing device, they struck the left inner wall.

“...!!”

They tore through the neurological device in the back that controlled the left half of the body and they shot out into the sky behind.

The God of War’s system had already performed an emergency shutdown on the connection with the pilot. The God of War had been abandoned to preserve the valuable pilot.

“...!”

But the God of War retained the senses of the pilot for an instant and it forcefully bent back with no pilot.

“!”

Like a wave of blood, the coins illuminated by the red setting sun poured into the sky from the lower neck.

The God of War’s automatic controls spread the four cross-shaped wings on its back to stop its movements.

As a great number of coins, transfer fluid, and ether fuel burst from the front and back of the left side of the neck, the God of War fell.

Its wings still had power, so it automatically maintained its balance. However, the wind blew it around as its massive form slowly fell.

On Musashino, the members of the delivery union looked up into the sky and understood what had happened.

“...!”

Their cheers burst upwards.

But as some clasped hands, one old man slowly sat on the floor. He took a breath and a nearby young man spoke to him.

“Almirante, what is it?”

“I’d like to say it’s just that I’m tired, but that isn’t all. ...It may be selfish, but I don’t like seeing a God of War from my old nation being destroyed. But it’s fine.” He pulled a small bottle of alcohol from his pocket and spoke to the others as they quieted down a bit. “Alcohol works for both celebration and mourning. Let’s celebrate for the two up there. You all remember how you were welcomed back after your first battle, don’t you?”

Two figures remained in midair.

The gold and black winged figures embraced in the evening sky.

They both caught their breath; the gold one had sweat on her brow, and the black one had blood. However, neither wiped the liquid away as they created a divine transmission Magie Figur in the air.

“Neshinbara, we’ve taken care of their God of War.”

“Good. We still have to worry about their cannons, but we don’t have to worry about an attack from above now. Come on back.”

“Judge,” they both said before eliminating the Magie Figur.

“Ha ha. Ga-chan, you got Weiss Fräulein destroyed.”

“Quiet.”

The white Technohexen embraced the black one even closer.

“Ga-chan, are you trembling?”

“So are you, Margot.”

They exchanged a glance and nodded slowly.

“Just for now.”

They both nestled close and joined their lips to rid themselves of their trembling. And...

“We managed,” said Naito as she licked up the blood on Naruze’s lips.

“Yes,” agreed Naruze.

When Naruze looked to the southwestern sky, Naito did the same.

“That ship let off some troops, so the ones in the western plain are having the hardest time right now. But...”

They slowly turned to the east. They looked to Asakusa, Musashi’s first port ship. That cargo ship was hidden by the mountain in the center of the land port.

“Everyone’s counting on you. Hurry!”

On the western plain, the K.P.A. Italia and Tres España troops finally clashed with the Musashi group driven to the foot of the eastern mountain.

The combined unit’s morale was high. Their God of War had been shot down, but the Technohexen had been more or less taken out as well.

Their overwhelming advantage remained.

And their enemy had no way of sending in additional support. The mountain pass’s barrier was sealed and the Musashi’s starboard side was held in check by the aerial ships. Even if they attempted to cross the eastern mountain, they would put themselves within range of those ships.

So...

“Push!! Don’t just try to stall them! Let’s go for a true victory!!”

They applied great pressure and pushed at the Musashi group that was deflecting their attacks with spears and charms.

“Crush them! That is how we will sever all of the Far East’s regrets!!”

With that cry, the combined unit began working in perfect unison. The one thousand K.P.A. Italia and Tres España troops worked together.

They sealed off the exit of the western plain and pushed Musashi’s attack unit further eastward.

Their momentum and their wall of people applied great pressure to the Musashi group and tried to crush them as if sewing them to the foot of the mountain.

But someone let out a yell.

As the Musashi group quickly fell back, a slender figure at the center brought a hand to his forehead and looked up into the heavens.

“Ohhhhh! Right now! Literally everyone’s trying to penetrate me with their spear!!”

“You’re gonna distract us from defending, so quiet down!!”

But despite everyone shouting at him, Toori showed no change of expression and continued speaking while raising his arms.

“Ohhh! Please help me! Officer!!”

His cry carried into the distance. Naturally, no help came and the combined unit shouted back in unison.

“You aren’t getting any help, you idiot! How is help even supposed to get to you!?”

But that was when everyone heard a light sound of something bursting.

Twice, the sound reached them through the air.

“...!?”

It came from beyond the eastern mountain. It came from Asakusa, the Musashi’s first port ship and a cargo ship.

A few of the soldiers recognized the sound.

“A God of War being launched?”

They had distinctly heard that sound twice.

“But not even the Musashi can launch a God of War over the mountain!”

“Yeah! You’re right! That’s meant to move our Gods of War around the Musashi itself. It flies almost straight up and it doesn’t have enough height to cross the mountain,” answered Toori to explain exactly why it was impossible. But he did not stop there. “But we’ll show you that there’s another method that only the Musashi can pull off!”

“You have another method!?”

“Ha ha ha,” laughed Toori. “We do! I call it the Derrick Ultimate Destiny!”

C'mon, everyone!!”

“We have to go whether you tell us to or not!” shouted Naomasa from the shoulder of a red heavy God of War on Asakusa. She raised her right false arm. “Prepare yourself, Jizuri Suzaku!!”

With those words, Jizuri Suzaku lowered its hips.

A thick rope was attached to the back of its waist. The rope was one used with the derrick cranes and both ends passed forward and up in a V-shape from either side of Jizuri Suzaku.

“Are the two derricks ready!?”

The two giant derricks used for carrying cargo, Asakusa’s first and second derrick, had the ends of their arms lined up to the side.

The rope extending from either side of Jizuri Suzaku passed through and hung down from the pulleys on the left and right arms located 150 meters up. But...

“...!!”

Two Gods of War were launched from up in the sky. They had anchors attached at the waist to weigh them down.

And the two Gods of War fell at almost the exact same time.

Their trajectory slipped just past the derrick arms on either side and touched the ropes hanging down.

“Contact!!”

Without negating the momentum of their fall, the two Gods of War grabbed the ropes as if colliding with them.

In an instant, the ropes grew taut and the ends of the derricks bent.

“Go!!”

All of those in work uniforms standing on the lines of cargo shouted out and the two Gods of War continued to fall while holding the ropes.

The left and right ropes were pulled with blinding speed by the falling Gods of

War.

Sparks burst from the base of the pulleys and the ropes waved and drew tight.

The rest was simple. The center of the V-shape created by the two ropes was located at the back of Jizuri Suzaku's waist.

"Oh."

The ropes pulled it up, it floated, and then...

"Go!!"

The red God of War was launched into the sky as if by a catapult.

Atop Regno Unito, a single action occurred below the command and divine transmission tent.

The divine transmission arriving from different areas caused everyone there to stand up and look to the northern sky.

A red God of War flew through the sky after being forcibly launched.

Its legs and other parts had been given reinforced parts to withstand the launch and landing. It must have been used to being launched because it showed no sign of panic.

Someone spoke quietly below the command tent.

"If a God of War can fly that far, how far would something else go?"

The voice trembled slightly and a similarly shaking voice slowly answered.

"No, the lighter the object, the sooner it would decelerate, so it would not fly as far. ...I think."

"Either way, it's going to land in the middle of our unit! If it falls that quickly along that trajectory, our *corazzata* can't aim their anti-air weaponry fast enough!"

The foundation of their tactics had been for Musashi's aerial forces to be held back by the Testament Union's aerial weaponry and the natural terrain.

The Testament Union had data on the Musashi and they understood how far it could launch things. They also had full understanding of the armaments it contained.

However...

“Who would have thought they could use it like this...” muttered someone.

“I have the estimated path of the God of War!!”

Everyone turned toward the female student in charge of divine transmissions. She took a breath before speaking.

“The center of the eastern plain! It will land in front of the combined unit currently concentrated on the southeastern side!”

“Have the northern side of the unit concentrate their defenses! Even if it’s a God of War, it’s only one! They can minimize the damage by focusing their defenses and falling back! After withstanding the blow, they can push back! And...”

And...

“Crush Musashi’s chancellor while they do!!”

“Go, Jizuri Suzaku!!” cried Naomasa from the shoulder of the red God of War that had already begun to descend.

It had not flown far enough. They had hooked up the ropes at the angle they thought was best, but its weight was still a bottleneck.

...But the reinforced parts are necessary.

If it was going to fly, it needed to withstand the recoil of launching and the impact of landing. A medium or light God of War might fly further, but it would not hold up when it clashed with the enemy formation afterwards. And a person was so light it would decelerate.

Thus a heavy God of War was the only option.

But it was not flying far enough; it was going to land in front of the enemy formation.

The enemy clearly understood that. In the eastern plain below, the parts of the giant formation not heading toward Toori's group had pressed together and were pointing their spell shields forward.

The God of War had to crush them and rescue their fellow students.

"And after Naruze and Naito finally secured our air superiority!"

If an aerial combat God of War had remained in air during the launch and flight, Jizuri Suzaku could have been attacked. That was why they had made the preparations behind the cargo while Naruze and Naito battled the God of War.

And the two of them had done well.

"That just leaves our flight distance!!"

Naomasa knew the God of War was not going to reach.

But the corner of her mouth rose in a smile as she looked down at the one thousand or more white spell shields.

"So their frontal defenses are perfect. In that case..." She shouted out. "Go, Mito!"

"I am right here. You do not have to yell."

The color silver stood up on the opposite shoulder.

It was Mitotsudaira. She did not wear her uniform below her silver hair. Instead, she wore an outfit that resembled a light blue and white dress. However, her usual four long leather cases hung down from her hands and shoulders.

She leaped through the wind. She lightly and surely landed on Jizuri Suzaku's left hand.

"Go!!"

Jizuri Suzaku swung its arm through the air and threw Mitotsudaira forward.

A silver flower blossomed over the heads of the combined unit preparing its defenses forward.

At thirty meters above the ground, Mitotsudaira's silver hair whipped in the wind and the two leather cases in her hands opened.

"Go, Argent Chaîne!"

With those words, she pulled one meter obelisks from the cases.

The two obelisks connected to the hard points on the back of her shoulders. A dull metallic noise confirmed that they had clicked into place.

"Begin chain supply!"

The puffed out shoulders of her armor shook.

A slit opened in the sides of those shoulder puffs and the color red spilled out.

That color was a giant jewel resembling three claws.

But that was not all. The obelisks on her shoulders produced metallic noises and shook as the two jewels were pushed outwards, and something else followed them.

They were chains.

The chains were thicker than a human hand and the jewels hung from the ends. As they were released, they traveled along her arms like living creatures and passed through metal loops attached to her wrists.

The chains were long and they were only growing longer.

"...!"

The two chains instantly grew to silver tails measuring several meters and they swung wide around her.

She swung her arms backwards as if to strike something as she prepared for her landing.

She traveled toward the center of the one thousand man defense.

That unit had already focused their defenses on the front, so they were left almost defenseless against this overhead strike.

But the commanders of each individual unit shouted out.

"They're just chains! Endure the first strike and crush her when she lands!!"

“Oh, how crass.”

As she fell, Mitotsudaira swung the chains. She swung them upwards as if to circle around behind her.

“My Argent Chaîne are not mere chains. They are *intelligence chaîne*.”

Something flew in behind her.

The giant metal objects resembled arms. They were the reinforced parts attached to Jizuri Suzaku’s arms so it could withstand the recoil of being launched. They weighed several tons each and they had been thrown toward Mitotsudaira’s back.

Everyone thought they would hit her.

“These transmit my strength and can be called a part of my body.”

The jewel-like decorative claws at the ends of the Argent Chaîne grabbed the god of war parts.

The chains casually swung the masses of metal upwards. The movement started gently but eventually became a smashing movement.

“...”

Mitotsudaira bent the several meter pieces of metal as if trying to throw her entire body forward.

“In the name of the Argent Loup, let out a howl, Argent Chaîne!!”

She used brute strength to attack the thousand soldiers.

The two strikes from overhead were disastrous for the formation with its defenses focused forward.

The attack was cleverly made to cross slightly to the left and right so as to knock everyone outwards.

“...!?”

A cascade of intense noises spread out.

The soldiers were not just swept away or knocked away. They were blown

away by a combination of the two.

The instant of impact appeared to happen in slow motion, but the people were thrown high into the air an instant later. Some were slammed into the ground, some flew further into the air, and others struck their fellow soldiers. The only things that were certain were the sounds of impact, the mixture of screams, and the person standing in the several meters of cleared space.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy’s 5th Special Duty Officer, Nate ‘Argent Loup’ Mitotsudaira. I look forward to having you as my opponent.”

As she spoke, her blue outfit wrapped its arms deeply around her body.

Synchronized with that action, the silver chains flew in an arc. The masses of metal were half buried in the ground, but they were easily lifted into the air and pursued the arcing path of the silver chains.

“!!”

And they struck the people who were taking defensive stances.

That was when it began.

The soles of Mitotsudaira’s shoes became triangular blades and she stabbed just the right one into the ground. With that supporting her, she swung her body around.

Her arms raced about as if fluttering in the wind and the chains reached the enemies faster than whips.

“...!”

The massive pieces of metal rotated around her. The rotation reached 360 degrees and knocked the enemies away like a windstorm.

Her attack hit.

They tried to endure but were ultimately unable to. In an instant, several dozen soldiers flew into the air.

Even in armor, a human weighed no more than 200 kilograms. For the pieces of metal being swung around at high speed, that was like a baseball bat hitting the ball dead on. The ones launched upwards were the lucky ones. The ones

slammed to the ground took out their own comrades and were unable to even scream.

Each strike took out several people as she wore down their numbers.

“...!!”

The storm of blows did not stop. The sounds continued, more space was opened, and the chains extended further.

And then Mitotsudaira raised the speed of her rotation.

“I have come to save you, my king!”

The silver wind continued across the battlefield without end.

With each step, she swung her entire body and swung the chains such that they intersected. The spiraling light of the chains raced through the air, pulled back, squeezed, arced once more, undulated, danced, and knocked even more people through the air with each consecutive sound of impact.

It was a storm of silver light.

And Mitotsudaira bent back and swung her arms back as if they were wings.

The chains racing ahead of her flew behind her like waves.

“!”

And then she flapped those wings. She lowered her upper body almost to the ground before swinging both arms forward along either side. The masses of metal flew horizontally. With repeated snaps of the wrist, the people along their paths were launched into the air.

“Strike!”

As they flew forward, the two pieces of metal assaulted the back of the unit charging toward Toori's formation.

It hit them hard.

The strike from an unexpected direction slowed the charge, but Mitotsudaira's chains had grown lighter.

She only had the chains now and the enemy noticed.

“Now!”

With that shout, they held their shields and pikes toward her.

They had enough numbers to push her back, so they charged in with their spears without thinking about friendly fire.

But their movements were too slow and lacking in skill. Mitotsudaira quickly drew back the Argent Chaîne and swung them around.

“Heh,” she laughed quietly.

She then opened the lids on the bottom of the cases on her shoulders.

Those charging toward her watched in surprise.

“Two more.”

By lowering her waist, the obelisks attached to the chain suppliers at the base of the slits on either side of her skirt.



Chains were instantly released from either side of her waist. They wrapped around her arms and gave her four in total.

“...!!”

From there, she could do as she pleased.

Before the enemy made it even a few steps, her Argent Chaîne grabbed the chests of four of them.

With an instantaneous movement, the claws grabbed them and lifted them up.

“...!”

It slammed them to the ground, grabbed another and repeated the process.

Mitotsudaira moved as if dancing. She moved her arms like wings, she tore at the air, she leaned forward, she leaned backwards, she rotated around, and she became the eye of the storm.

The silver chains danced through the air around her. They formed a helix around her slender body, surged out like waves, and shot out in straight lines. They swung enemies around, swept them away, tossed them, grabbed new enemies, swung them upwards, slammed them down, and occasionally grabbed an abandoned cannon to slam it into them.

“...!”

She danced. The Argent Loup continued the unrestricted howling dance of the silver chains.

In the center of the storm of Argent Chaîne, Mitotsudaira’s dance led the movements of the chains.

There were weapons everywhere in the storm. Even an enemy soldier would work.

The chains transmitted her strength. Rather than simply swinging around, their paths changed to match the movements of her arms and they raced about devouring the enemy like a beast.

As the enemy drew back in fear, the chains grabbed four of them and lifted

them up high.

“There is no need to fear me. After all, our chancellor does not fear me.”

Her words led to her power beginning to move once more. The enemy let out screams and moved away, so she passed through the opening, ignored those with their backs turned, attacked those still resisting, and ran onward.

The silver wind destroyed the enemy formation as she moved to the east.

She swept away the group as if opening a gate to Toori's group at the foot of the mountain to the east.

“!!”

She swept through them and faced forward.

She had arrived, so she let out a warm breath while ignoring the sweat on her brow.

“Can I hope for words of thanks? Or will you be using my old debt here?”

The idiot raised a hand and answered while clinging to a tree.

“Okay, good girl. Stay, stay.”

“I-I am not a dog.”

“True,” he immediately replied. “You're a knight.”

Mitotsudaira almost smiled at that.

“...”

But she restrained herself. Only the slightest hint of a smile reached her face, but it was a full-faced smile in her heart.

“I will pave a path, my king. So that you might seek your loss. And leave the rest to me. I will make sure none here pursue you.”

And...

“That is something only I can do.”

A moment later, a sound of great impact came from the recovering enemy formation behind her.

Naomasa's Jizuri Suzaku had charged into the regrouping combined unit.

Silence had fallen over the white K.P.A. Italia ship named Regno Unito.

The sounds of battle could be heard in the distance and a divine transmission had arrived to describe the situation.

The aerial ships over the western plain continued to fire on the Musashi while falling back in the southern sky. That was to prevent the Musashi forces from boarding them now that a God of War and a knight had arrived in the battle below.

The Testament Union was falling back, but the command center and divine transmission center were both motionless.

But then a sudden voice broke that silence.

"This is about imagination."

Those words sent a chill through the silent area.

Everyone saw a white figure stand up from the table set on the front deck.

A middle-aged student in the command center frantically spoke up.

"Your holiness, there is no need for you to get up."

"Can your imagination keep me in this chair? Hm? Can it?"

Innocentius's eyebrows rose in a smile and he looked to the north.

About a kilometer away, Musashi's guard unit was surging from the eastern plain's exit.

The Testament Union had cargo ships at all important points and the remaining land units were prepared to intercept. But Innocentius spoke quietly as he saw the Musashi students' momentum.

"Super derricks over 150 meters in height can only be found on the Musashi. They must have had all sorts of silly ideas while looking up at them, day in and day out. And that has given them reinforcements who can literally handle a thousand troops singlehandedly. Even if we use armies, weaponry, and heroes to fight in the style of this era, we cannot bind them. With their level of

imagination, I will surely be forced to leave my chair.”

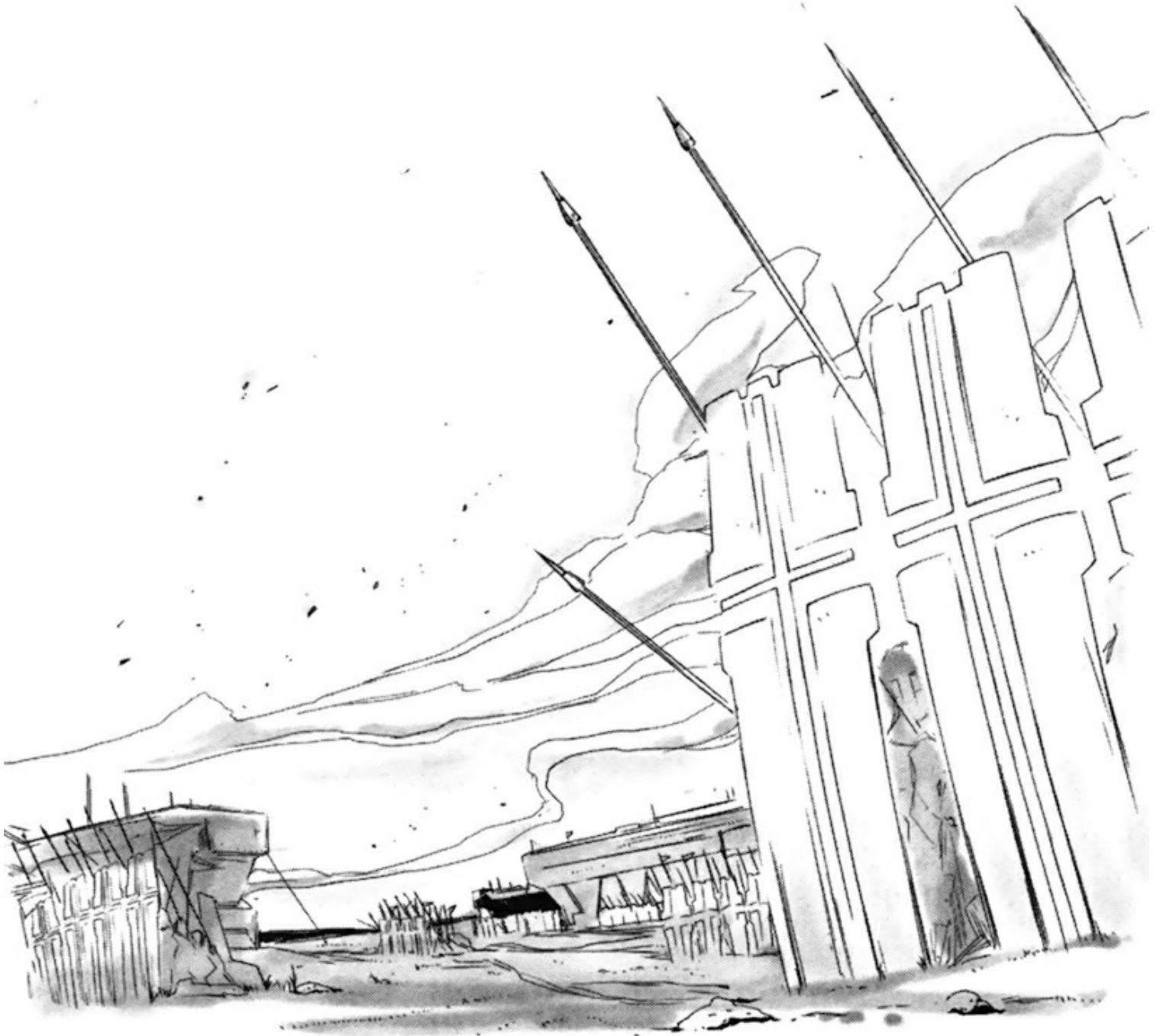
He grabbed the water bottle from the table, sipped, and took a breath.

“In that case, we need imagination too. These idiots are willing to say they hate me to my face, but I will not crush them with words. I will prove myself with results. And to do that, I will use every means available to me. And that includes heading out myself. Isn’t that right? Hm?”

Chapter 38: Musashi's Mr. Impossible

CHAPTER 38

"Musashi's Mr. Impossible"



Someone says
They want to do something
Point Allocation (Smile)

Someone says

They want to do something

Point Allocation (Smile)

Toori and the others ran.

Mikawa's general land port was a vast field bordering the ocean.

To the west were some hills, to the east was the bay, and to the south...

"The enemy, their ships...and Horizon-dono!"

As Musashi's group entered the land port from the north, Tenzou ran out front.

Toori nodded in agreement from behind him and peered into the distance.

"Oh, Tenzou's right! Horizon's finally in sight."

As Toori spoke, he faced the Tres Españan interrogation ship visible in the distance. The bottom portion of its bow contained a facility known as the Andamio de la Ejecución and Horizon was within it.

"Let's go!"

They all continued on with Tenzou the ninja at the lead because he could tell where on the battlefield was safe.

They were all exhausted. They were out of breath, sweaty, and their defensive charms were running out, but the bullets did not stop.

Occasionally, the person running alongside someone would suddenly double over and not continue on.

Once they passed through the rain of bullets, the enemy's pike unit would come out. And once they forced passed them, the bullets would arrive once more.

They ran in a line. Adele took the lead while Persona-kun held her and those with some protective charms left or those with defensive divine protection would follow in a rotation.

But...

“Sorry. I’m already out of internal Blessings!”

Everyone was running out of charms or of the internal Blessings stored inside them that were needed to activate divine protection. They had already made as many dedications as they could and requested as many substitute divine protections as they could.

“Shit. I’ll be eating nothing but grains for a week after this battle.”

“Yeah. After the battle, I have three days to dedicate twenty divine figurines at the shrine.”

“I’m banned from all sexual acts for a week afterwards. I’m already regretting that decision.”

“Wow...”

As they all sympathized with that one student, Toori nodded deeply and spoke while maintaining his running speed.

“Whether we win or lose, you guys have raised some serious death flags.”

“Ah! I don’t want to hear that from him of all people!!”

They clashed, overcame, and were slowed down, but they never forgot to continue forward.

A white ship was about three hundred meters ahead. It was K.P.A. Italia’s Regno Unito.

Once they passed it, they would be almost to the interrogation ship.

“Hurry!”

Everyone felt this was the last spurt, but something changed that.

“...!?”

A K.P.A. Italia pike unit appeared from behind the white ship in enough numbers to resemble a wave.

A red demon stood at the head of the K.P.A. Italia unit. He was Galileo and he

spoke on behalf of the pike unit behind him.

“Now, these are K.P.A. Italia’s official troops. I suppose you could call them the Papa-Schola’s elite guards. Those previous troops were promising youths, but these have experience and have proven their ability,” he said. “So there is little chance you can stand up to them.”

As if to defy his words, Musashi’s guard unit dashed toward and clashed with K.P.A. Italia’s experienced troops.

Their opponent formed a sturdy wall, so Musashi’s youths created a spear-like formation and charged.

“———!”

When the two sides collided, a cascade of metallic noises and sounds of impact rose into the air.

And Musashi’s group pushed. They tried to push through. Their opponent’s heels slid backwards and their gathered bodies fell back as well, but a voice came from one point.

“Don’t underestimate us, you kids!”

The enemy pulled back and used the slight space to take a running start while lowering their bodies.

When they clashed once more, Musashi’s front line was pushed upwards.

“Kh!”

As Musashi’s side groaned, the enemy’s front line let out a shout and gathered strength in their shoulders as they pushed upwards.

“You don’t stand a chance! Our many years of experience give us the edge!”

A new voice joined the shouts of the army.

“That is exactly right. How do you plan to overcome that difference in history, hm?”

Someone looked down on them from the deck of the white ship seventy meters up.

Toori looked up at the man in a white cloak while he pushed in on the scrum

from behind, copped a feel of a girl's butt, and got kicked away.

“Old man!”

“Call me ‘your holiness’, boy.”

As he spoke, Innocentius raised his right hand. That hand contained what looked like a long scythe or a hammer.

“This is Stithos Porneia, the Logismoι Óplo of Lust. I will now show you what happens when its rightful owner uses it.”

A low, thick noise came from the hammer Logismoι Óplo.

It shook the air much like a bell.

“———!”

All of the weapons the Musashi side was using in the clash came apart in no time at all.

Their weapons had been defanged.

The fasteners, screws, and glued parts all came off, so they could not be fixed.

Some frantically caught the blades that fell into the air, but the blades did not injure their hands. The blades had been dulled. They had become nothing more than thin pieces of metal with angled edges.

Innocentius spoke from above, where the noise had come from.

“My Stithos Porneia is a Logismoι Óplo without an offensive ability. Its overdrive completely *defangs* the weapons of all enemies that this *battaglia martello* can see within about three kilometers.”

His words meant one very important thing.

K.P.A. Italia and Tres España's weapons would not be defanged. Which meant...

“Victory is ours!!”

The wall of enemies suddenly pushed back against Musashi's charge.

The people had vanished from the open passageways within the Musashi.

Everyone had evacuated to the long blocks that functioned as underground residential space or the wide blocks that connected them as a central floor. The wide blocks had stairways up and down and open spaces used for the cargo lift hatches, so the families with children, pregnant women, the sick, and the aged had gathered in them.

A stir ran through the people as they listened to the words of the battlefield being broadcast there.

“Calm down.”

Someone stood up within the group and stopped them from talking.

It was Azuma. He walked between them and spoke to crying children and those who looked worried.

...This is the best I can do right now.

He spoke as he thought.

“I think you will be faced with many decisions from now on. Whether you will choose to oppose my and my friends’ decisions or whatever else you might choose, it is your thoughts, your destinies, and the general flow of events that will lead you to embrace whatever decisions you will make.”

But...

“But for now, please just watch. I will not ask you not to worry. I will not ask you to escape reality by thinking about enjoyable things. All I ask is that you watch this through to its conclusion.”

He felt he was being horribly conceited.

...That sounds like something Miriam would say.

Saying it before he apologized made it seem even more that way.

The people exchanged glances.

“Well, if the crown prince says so...”

They nodded but also tilted their heads. From their postures, it was clear they did not all agree and Azuma was certain some of them would eventually split

off.

That was when a large door behind him opened and bright colors entered.

A food cart was being pulled in.

“Hello, everyone. This is an overpriced food cart from the Ohiroshiki family’s line of ‘Fatty’s Foods’ snack shops!”

“Today’s dish is curry. It has spices to calm you down.”

“Um... Th-this is volunteer work, right? You aren’t charging for it, right?” asked Azuma. “And you didn’t put any weird drugs in there?”

Ohiroshiki nodded.

“Of course not! I swiped this food cart from my money-hungry father so I could bring a storm of charity to the Musashi! Now, line up! Little girls first! ... Ah, why are filthy old men the only ones lining up!? Wait! Don’t take off your shirts! Please don’t! Ah, that looks really salty!”

Further back in the ship where the families with children had gathered, Itoken and Nenji stood in front of a Broadcast Committee film crew. They spoke to the film crew and the children gathered around them.

“Are you listening, good children of Musashi!? To say goodbye to our worries, Brother Itoken and Mr. Nenji have a special lesson at a special time today!”

“Heh. Are you ready to get all sticky and messy, children?”

One of the children sitting nearby raised his hand.

“Brother Itoken! Why aren’t you two fighting!? Are you useless!?”

“Ha ha ha. What are you talking about? If Mr. Nenji and I got serious, we could easily contaminate and bring down an aerial warship, but our friends are doing all the work this time! Make sure to cheer for them!” Itoken raised a hand toward the film crew and gave a glittering smile. “Okay, everyone! Let’s say goodbye to our worries with some exercise! Just follow my lead! Time for incubus exercising!”

“Get ready!”

“Okay... One, two! One, two! Stand behind your neighbor and move up with a

gouging motion!”

That scene worried Azuma, so he raised the volume of the four-screened divine monitor in the center of the area.

“W-well, everyone. The chancellor and the others are doing their best, so let’s keep that in mind.”

The instant he set the volume, voices burst from the sign frame. They belonged to Toori and the others with him.

“Waaaah! We’re gonna die! We’re totally gonna die!!”

The dumbfounded people tilted their heads quizzically.

...Wh-what is going on?

On the vast battlefield near the ocean, two armies clashed.

But one side’s destruction had sent that clash in a new direction.

To the north, Musashi’s troops were trying to pass by the large white ship, but they had lost their weapons and they had begun to collapse.

There was a simple reason for this: the pope-chancellor’s Logismoι Óplo ‘Stithos Porneia’ had defanged their weapons.

Whether it was a punch, a kick, or a throw, any action taken with the intention to attack would lose all force the instant it touched their enemy.

“...!”

They would simply be pushed back or blown away by a counterattack.

Their shields and armor had not been defanged. They were thankful for that, but they had still lost their weapons after building up fatigue. Their numbers were being carved away and someone cried out to oppose this turn of events.

“Can’t we do something!?”

The boy knew they could not, but someone suddenly answered his request.

“Do you want to do something about this?”

It was Toori. While doing whatever he could to support the others, he spoke

with a sweaty, smiling face as the entire guard unit turned back toward him.

“Do you want to rescue Horizon?”

Even in this unfavorable situation in which they were beginning to crumble, his question received a shouted answer.

“Of course!”

It was unclear who had given it. It might have been one person, it might have been multiple, and it might have been all of them, but someone did respond.

“No matter what happens or what reasons people give, I believe any Far Easterner would want to rescue someone facing an unreasonable death!”

After all...

“I don’t remember living a life in which I could believe that someone being given an unreasonable death should just die!!”

“I see.” Toori gave a loose smile covering his entire mouth and he looked down at the ground while still smiling. “Then... you all think that way, don’t you?”

When he raised his head, he continued on to look up into the sky and into the distance. And he opened his mouth wide to shout.

“Okay, Asama. ...I’m really gonna ask for it!! Please approve my contract!!”

Asama stood atop a derrick mast while the sounds of shellfire and the wind washed over her.

She still aimed her bow in the general direction of the guard ships as the wind whipped her hair about.

“Are you sure? Are you sure you aren’t just choosing an extreme method to get through a difficult situation?”

She had to ask, but the response was simple.

“Do it.”

She could not refuse. Thinking “that’s right” was the most resistance she

could muster.

“...”

She sighed.

...Honestly, that boy and his sister always cause me so much trouble.

As she thought, her shoulders lowered, but she did not hang her head. She simply nodded to Hanami on her shoulder and opened a torii-style sign frame in front of her hand. She checked to make sure the guard ship's ether cannon was not producing any light and got to work.

“Toori-kun, please do not forget that responsibility will lie with the Asama Shrine, so we guarantee to provide as much support as possible if something happens.”

“Are you upset?”

“Of course I am. But...I know you won't listen now that you've made up your mind.”

As she spoke, Asama touched a point on the sign frame.

“This is Asama Tomo, supervisor of Asama Shrine contract signatory Aoi Toori. ...I am sending the shrine Aoi Toori's request for a superior contract and the approval for the contract.”

“Clap.”

To confirm the contents of the contract's divine protection, Asama spoke it aloud.

“The divine protection requested by the contract is to transmit and distribute the full abilities of the signatory as an alteration of the emotion transmission divine protection provided by Mitsuha of the Uzume-style gods of performing arts. In exchange, the signatory agrees to continually carry the emotion of joy as a performing arts dedication. And...if the signatory ever gains the emotion of sadness, his dedication will have failed and he will be tainted.”

She spoke.

“As a reaction to the divine protection, his tainted abilities will be purified and

eliminated.”

Meaning...

“If you ever feel sad from now on, you will die, Toori-kun.”

But in exchange...

“You can now transmit and distribute all of yourself!”

“What!? Mr. Impossible can transmit all of himself!? So what!?”

The battlefield reacted to Asama’s voice over the divine transmission.

The K.P.A. Italia students began jeering as they attempted to crush the Musashi students.

“Transmitting all of Mr. Impossible won’t make victory any more possible!”

With loud voices and great momentum, the black uniforms and armor of K.P.A. Italia charged forward with weapons in hand.

The Musashi group was unable to argue back and could only prepare to defend.

They groaned and their balance was already shifted backwards. They would be unable to endure this clash and they would be forced back and crushed.

But someone shouted out. It was Mr. Impossible himself, Aoi Toori.

“Prepare yourselves, everyone!”

His voice contained a bright smile that some might have called shrill, but his shout caused everyone to move.

They were taken aback as they used all of their powerless bodies to defend. An instant later, the K.P.A. Italia warriors arrived with an upward stabbing motion.

“Be crushed, Far East!!”

With a great rumbling sound, the result quickly showed itself.

The sounds and result of the clash on the battlefield were quite clear.

As they crashed into the Musashi guard unit, K.P.A. Italia's warriors were knocked flying through the air.

"Eh?"

The Musashi youths' eyes opened wide, but they were still standing.

Meanwhile, K.P.A. Italia's front lines were either collapsed on the ground or their armor could be heard landing.

The exhausted Musashi side remained and the K.P.A. Italia side had been defeated.

The remaining K.P.A. Italia warriors and the Musashi guard unit that stood still in confusion both realized what had happened at the same moment.

"Why can we use the defense spells that need Blessings?"

As they stood defensively, the spells on their arms and bodies were emitting light despite supposedly having been used up.

They all asked what had happened and finally turned toward a certain boy: Aoi Toori.

At some point, bluish-white ether light had appeared in his arms and decorative chains.

It was bright enough to see with the naked eye. However, he was not using a spell or anything else. That glow of pure ether told them the meaning of the contract Asama had described.

"Is that what it means for Mr. Impossible to transmit all of himself?"

Someone shouted out when they heard what those on the battlefield were saying.

It was Yoshinao as he drank tea at the table on Musashino's bow. He lowered his head as if peering into the teacup in his hand.

"Transmitting his full abilities? Is this why that idiot wanted to be king!?"

“Honey? What do you mean?” asked his wife.

He turned toward her with raised eyebrows.

“That idiot... He now has the power to transmit his abilities! He can distribute ‘his entire self’ to others! And he is now Musashi’s viceroy! He holds one quarter of Musashi’s authority. And that means...”

He said it.

“Ether!! By risking his life, Aoi Toori can now take one quarter of the ether fuel held in the Musashi and use his transmission divine protection to send it to others via Ley Lines!”

And what did that mean?

...Regardless of age, those fighting alongside him can become monsters who can use their spells without end!

But, he also thought. How much resolution does it take to bear a death sentence for feeling sad?

Yoshinao nodded toward his wife and spoke to the surrounding students.

“Support your king.”

They all slowly but surely nodded and then the entirety of Musashi suddenly shook.

It could be called a vertical shaking, a horizontal shaking, or even a vibration.

“Is he going to use the ether supply his authority as viceroy gives him!?”

Amid all the people on the battlefield who were unsure what to do, Toori raised both his arms.

“Relax! I, Aoi Toori, am here with my power of impossibility!”

He swung down his arms and made a loud announcement as ether light scattered around him.

“I will bear your impossibilities, so you all take the power of possibility!”

The Musashi group exchanged a glance but they all nodded while baring their

teeth.

“Judge!”

They all took in a breath and threw themselves forward.

“Judgment! Yes, we are those receiving holy punishment!

“We are the punished who continue on by devouring our king’s possibility!!”

“But we are also those who will not bring sadness to our king!!”

As they endured and let out roars, they repeatedly used defensive spells and crashed into their enemy’s front line.

The used all sorts of spells while no longer worrying about the usage time: purifications, shields, raised evasion speed, fatigue recovery.

“Go, chancellor!”

“C’m on, guys. Just because you can withstand it doesn’t mean you should be reckless.”

“But we have no other choice. We know how to stop the pope-chancellor, but we can’t do it.”

That method was based in the academy rules. If a chancellor, Student Council president, or an officer with the right to act on their behalf opposed him, he would be restricted to single combat.

If Toori wished to battle Innocentius, Toori would be the only one the man could use the Logismoi Óplo’s power on.

But Toori had to go to Horizon.

“We’ve taken your possibilities! We’ll do what we can here to repay you, so...”

Before they could tell him to go, a shout cut through the battlefield.

“I am here!”

Someone in a male uniform stood by the exit from the western plain to the north.

“I am Honda Masazumi, Vice President of Musashi Ariadust Academy! I challenge K.P.A. Italia Papa-Schola Innocentius to single combat!!”

After her shout, Masazumi gasped for breath, but she quickly stood back up and ignored the sweat on her brow.

“As a representative of the Testament Union, you will not try to escape this single combat, will you!?”

Atop Regno Unito, Innocentius took in a breath and looked toward Masazumi.

...Oh?

If she was challenging him to single combat, she had to have some hope of victory. She was about a kilometer away and she had likely been waiting ever since arriving through the mountain pass after the others.

She had run up as the aerial ships had moved back to the south.

The fact that she was separated from Musashi's formation meant she had some kind of plan.

And so Innocentius reached into his pocket.

In his pocket were holy spell charms. Classica Firma were single-use, but they had great power.

They could do anything: summon lightning, fire bullets, explode on impact, *etc.* More than one could be used together to increase their power.

He clearly had the advantage.

But he saw a smile on the corner of her mouth and he saw her hands in the pocket binders at her waist.

...Has she brought some Shinto spell charms?

While reminding himself to remain cautious, he looked down below.

The experienced warriors and the Musashi warriors were clashing again and again with neither making any real headway. If he accepted the challenge to single combat, the enemy would be able to use their weapons and the experienced warriors below would be in danger.

But he saw Galileo and the others turn sharp gazes his way.

“Your holiness! Show her what we’re made of!!”

Hearing their request, he nodded.

...Either way, the representative of the Testament Union cannot escape the academy rules.

“I accept.”

The air was dyed by a loud low-pitched noise coming from Stithos Porneia.

That was the sound of Stithos Porneia deactivating.

Down below, angry yells and roars were mixed in with the sounds of clashing metal. With Galileo on their side, Innocentius was fairly certain they would win, but he knew not to let his guard down. He had to hurry.

He reached into his pocket to activate a bundle of charms toward Masazumi.

“Your holiness!” shouted Masazumi.

...What is it now?

She was pointing toward the ground with her right hand. The dirt had crumbled due to the battle.

She took a step and confirmed that her foot sank down to the ankle.

“I apologize, but I want as fair a battle as possible! Could we move to a different battlefield!? If possible, I would like to use the western plain behind me!”

“No! If you do not wish to fight there, then come here! You only need to cross those battle scars, right!?”

“Judge. In that case... Please wait a moment!”

“Yes, hurry it up!”

Innocentius sighed, pulled his hand from his pocket, and prepared to end this with the charms in that hand the instant Masazumi arrived.

But then he looked up.

Masazumi was beginning to cross the five meter wide crumbled portion of ground.

“There.”

She raised her right leg high and lowered it. She took a firm step forward.

But despite how much time the step had taken her, she had only advanced about three centimeters.

She was walking slowly to buy time.

“Damn you!!”

Masazumi shrugged and ignored Innocentius’s shout.

She once more slowly raised her leg up high yet lowered it extremely close by.

“You will wait for me to arrive there, won’t you? You were the one that told me to come to you after all,” she said. “Surely the representative of the Testament Union isn’t going to break his promise to fight in single combat.”

Innocentius and the others gasped at Masazumi’s casual comment.

But meanwhile, the battlefield continued to change.

The Musashi students let out a cry and split apart. One group held back K.P.A. Italia’s experienced warriors and the other group continued on with Toori.

“Galileo! Stop them!!” shouted Innocentius when he saw it.

He also jumped down from Regno Unito. As he watched Masazumi raise her leg high, he activated a charm and kicked at the air to accelerate forward. He hurried on as if running down an invisible flight of stairs.

“If I have the same footing as you, it will be an equal battlefield! I do not need to wait and you do not need to come to me! Galileo, hold them there! Do not let Musashi’s chancellor reach the interrogation ship!”

But he saw a boy standing before the demon who had attempted to rush out in pursuit.

...That is the boy who Galileo defeated only this afternoon.

His name was Noriki.

After experiencing defeat, the boy now stood before the one who had defeated him.

He struck Toori's hand as the other boy ran by him and he spoke.

"Go on. I have a job to take care of here."

Chapter 39: He who Gouges Holes in the Mainstream

CHAPTER 39

"He who Gouges Holes in the Mainstream"



What must I do

To regain my original position?

Point Allocation (Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems)

What must I do

To regain my original position?

Point Allocation (Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems)

On the deck of the Musashi's first central ship, everyone gradually gathered around Neshinbara.

Ohiroshiki and Hassan had brought the food cart up top, Shirojiro and Heidi had finished dealing with Musashi's accounting issues brought on by Mikawa's residential ship, Asama had left the derrick mast, and Naruze and Naito had been healed.

"What's happening now?"

"Well," answered Neshinbara. "Honda-kun is buying us some time with the pope-chancellor while Noriki-kun confronts Galileo."

Everyone frowned when they heard the name Galileo.

"Hm... If you ask me, the odds are about 7-3."

"At least say which side is Noriki, Margot."

"Noriki-kun's contract is with the Suwa Shrine, so it's hard to comment from the Asama Shrine's viewpoint."

"You all are pretty harsh on others, aren't you?" Neshinbara's shoulders drooped, but he quickly fixed his posture. "At any rate, the battlefield has begun to move and the next stage has begun."

What did that mean?

"Our main forces have finally begun confronting their hero-class fighters."

The black-clad demon looked at the boy who stood before him on the battlefield.

He had confronted this very same opponent a few hours earlier. He had said his name was Noriki.

He did not have the strength to damage Galileo with his attacks and he could

not avoid Galileo's spells.

...Nothing has changed.

Fighting an opponent who had not changed would accomplish nothing, so Galileo spoke.

"Could you give me a moment to think?"

As he spoke, he heard a sudden noise.

"...?"

It sounded like a paper bag splitting in the distance.

He looked over and saw the Tres Españan *acorazado* beginning to fire on the Musashi again while it fell back to the south.

...It is going to get noisy again.

It did not particularly matter. As Galileo began pondering the value of this opponent once more, that opponent tilted his head.

"The pope won't be happy if you don't do your job."

"It is important to think things through, boy. Innocentius has always been easily worked up. When he used to jump out the academy window, I warned him countless times to think carefully before jumping out, but I never taught him it was okay to jump from an even higher place without thinking."

"It's okay to jump out if you think about it first?"

That was obvious, so Galileo saw no reason to respond. What mattered was giving things thought. As long as one thought, the rest did not matter.

But, thought Galileo as he considered his opponent's value.

The Musashi side was receiving an ether supply from their chancellor. They could freely use Blessing-powered spells.

...But that of course has its limit.

Aoi Toori's ability came from a transmission divine protection, so he acted as a tap connecting the others to the Musashi's power.

He would bring the ether inside himself and then pass it on to the others.

And there was a limit to how much ether he could hold inside himself.

That was known as one's maximum internal Blessing quantity.

His was the ability to transmit that which was inside him, so he could not send out more ether than his own internal Blessing quantity. And in general, one's internal Blessing quantity was equal to one's age and stopped growing at about age thirty. Training and divine protection could extend it, but Galileo had seen the data on Aoi Toori.

...His internal Blessing quantity is in the upper forties or lower fifties.

It was an abnormally high number for his age, but it was likely supported by his contract with a performing arts transmission god. In all likelihood, he had been training to convey his feelings and thoughts to others for a long time.

But, thought Galileo. Forty or fifty is much too small a Blessing quantity to act as a tap for a giant aerial ship like the Musashi.

Even if he passed a single Blessing to each person, he could only aid around fifty at a time. There were many times that number on the battlefield.

He was not passing a massive amount of Blessings to all of them. He was choosing the most opportune moments to supply them with the bare minimum amount needed to activate their defensive divine protections or spells.

...But even that is amazing.

No other king could manage it.

A king wished to live on as the nation's leader and to stand above his subjects. Kings wanted to connect themselves to the authority of a god because they were a symbol of immortality and power.

But putting one's life on the line to transmit all of one's own ability was too great a risk. Also, possessing multiple divine protections would split their effectiveness, so he could not have any others while doing this.

This method put him one wrong step away from losing everything. He could not even possess a divine protection that would protect him or raise his own abilities.

...He is the opposite.

Innocentius and the kings of other nations focused on the centralization of power. They gathered all authority and riches on themselves and tried to move the nation while using their own plan as the foundation of it all.

This boy opposing them now was the opposite of that.

It was interesting.

That which lay outside the mainstream was valuable for its very existence. After all, if it could exist outside the mainstream, it might be the truth. Whatever one might say about the mainstream, the joy of holding the truth in one's hands was the ultimate entertainment.

...How very interesting!

"In that case, I wish to know more. Yes, I am done thinking now."

Galileo faced forward once more. The boy named Noriki stood there. Galileo saw no meaning in the fight, but touching that which lay outside the mainstream had value.

And so he gathered strength in his palm.

What would happen when he used the spell that had knocked the boy to the ground before?

How would the boy respond to the spell he had already seen once before?

With expectation in his heart, Galileo raised his arm toward the boy in front of him.

In response, the boy crossed his legs just once, rose sharply up on his toes, and turned a bit to the side. He then charged in to throw a punch.

"Too slow."

Everyone on the battlefield saw what happened in the next moment.

Noriki took a direct hit from Galileo's spell and was dragged along the ground.

In an instant, the sound of someone tearing into the earth caused everyone to stop moving. After a moment they spoke.

“A gag?”

Galileo was more surprised by the result than the surrounding people.

...Mh?

To his right, someone was doubled over and partway embedded in the ground.

The boy had not evaded in the slightest. He had rushed in and taken a direct hit from the spell.

...Did he have some reason to do that?

Galileo looked around. Those who had stopped to look his way frantically and awkwardly turned back to their proper opponent.

“U-um... Take this.”

“O-ow, that hurt.”

They were gradually building back up their energy. In a few seconds, they would return to a full-blown fistfight.

But the surprise of the others meant the boy was not working along with them.

Galileo could not sense the effects of a spell and they had not prepared a sniper.

He looked around in the distance once more but still found nothing.

...Then did he truly just take my attack?

Galileo did not understand it.

...But this may be part of his method as one who stands outside the mainstream.

By taking his opponent's attack and enduring, he could prove his strength.

“I believe the wrestling that has caught on in the New World and M.H.R.R. has an element of that to it.”

“I was born in Sagami.”

A voice rose from the ground. With the sound of tumbling stones, the boy rose to his feet while trembling.

His body shook and his eyes were unfocused, but he faced Galileo.

Galileo was just about to ask if he was okay.

“...!”

But the boy leaned toward Galileo and threw a fist with a torii-style emblem floating above it.

Galileo evaded. He used a spell to do so, so he circled behind the boy in an instant.

He now stood directly behind him.

And the boy was pulled forward by his own fist, so he could not turn around.

“Kh.”

He moved a few steps forward and fell to one knee.

Galileo heard him let out a breath. His body trembled and was clearly still suffering from the shock of the previous blow. He had to have been just barely managing to stand.

But he took in a breath, and stood up once more. He swayed unsteadily as he turned around on his right leg.

“This is tough.”

“What is with you?”

It was not that he was highly durable. He had taken severe damage.

...He is only able to stand because the ground was made of dirt.

The first time, he had been dragged along the hard ground of the schoolyard. But this dirt ground had absorbed some of the shock. And as this was the second time, he had been prepared for what kind of attack was coming.

But that still left him just barely able to stand. He had not endured especially well.

“Are you buying time?”

Musashi's vice president who Innocentius was running toward had also chosen to stall for time, so Galileo assumed this boy was doing the same.

But the boy's body lightly shook. As his dirty body trembled, he moved to the right and a torii-style emblem appeared on his right arm.

"I will now defeat you."

Galileo did not understand what he meant.

...*What?*

He did not know how the boy could be saying something so baseless.

He could finish this with a single use of his spell and the boy would be unable to avoid it in his current state.

"Do you understand what my spell is?"

"It recreates the movements of heavenly bodies," said the boy. "Your movement spell and the one that knocks me to the ground both use the motion of revolution."

"An excellent answer. Yes, the former is Heliocentrism and the latter is Geocentrism. Heliocentrism is a spell which causes me to revolve around a target. It moves me at the same speed as the earth's revolution, so it is impossible to see with the naked eye."

And...

"Geocentrism causes a target to revolve around me. I would prefer not to use it very much, but its existence was necessary in order to promote Heliocentrism over it."

"It seems to me you use it an awful lot."

"I have only had you revolve 90 degrees so far, so let me warn you. Next time, it will be a full 360 degrees."

"I've already said what I need to say."

The boy deepened his stance, regulated his breathing, and lowered his hips.

"...!"

In the instant Galileo saw him throw the punch, he used Heliocentrism on the boy.

In the next instant, everyone on the battlefield saw the result.

Light burst between Galileo and Noriki.

Everyone heard a clear echo resembling shattering glass. The scattering light was deflected in every direction. It backlit the two of them, provided direct light, and then vanished.

Everyone turned toward that instantaneous rumbling and light.

But as they watched, the boy had not collapsed as before.

He was unharmed and he was preparing his next punch.

The loss of weight in his hand and the lack of damage to the boy both confused Galileo.

...Why?

He did not understand, but he knew one thing for certain.

“My Geocentrism...”

“I destroyed it. And it will remain destroyed for at least as long as this confrontation lasts.”

Hearing that, Galileo looked toward his palm.

He willed the spell to activate as always. He imagined his internal Blessing ether gathering in his palm and built up the puzzle of his will. How, what, why, with what, and for what purpose? He passed ether through his will as he answered those questions, removed the excess, and created a spell.

“ ... ”

But Geocentrism did not appear in his hand. He could think it and feel it, but the spell would not complete.

...What is this?

He suddenly looked up at the boy and the spot the boy stood in.

...It can't be.

A few different figures were collapsed on the battlefield. Those figures were groaning and trying to move and they were a mix between Musashi's side and K.P.A. Italia's side. But Galileo looked at one individual in particular: the commander of K.P.A. Italia's guard unit.

He was the commander of the unit that had secured Princess Horizon the night before and he had defeated the boy who now stood before Galileo.

He had said that the boy's punch had not affected him at all.

Galileo's experiences had told him that the man had been exactly right.

...But what if this boy is not contained within that normal and "mainstream" line of thinking?

Galileo saw the torii-style emblem on the boy's arm gradually disappear.

The one he had seen on Ariadust's schoolyard had been a Suwa Shrine created spell named March. Galileo knew enough Far Eastern to know the name referred to the 3rd month.

That gave him an idea as to what had destroyed his Geocentrism.

"Created Spell 'January': Complete."

"So that is it!" Galileo understood. "You used March and you likely also used February to arrive at January!"

"There's no need to say it if you understand."

No, thought Galileo. Speaking it aloud to check is an important part of memorization.

"Boy! Your spell is made to overcome how weak your punches are. You dedicate two punches and use those dedications to activate a spell to strengthen your third!"

"Don't call me weak. As long as I can discipline my younger siblings, this is enough."

The boy prepared for another attack.

“A warning.”

He pulled back and clenched his right fist.

“The first punch is a dedication to ignore any defense. The second is a dedication to ensure the impact will reach any target. So as long as I am aware of it, there is nothing I can’t punch. And...”

Galileo sensed danger.

...Heliocentrism!

If he instantly circled behind the boy, there was nothing the boy could do. A demon’s outer shell and weight were a weapon in and of themselves. If he struck the boy with his arm, that would end it. He simply had to ensure the boy’s fist did not reach him. But...

“This is the third one. I already punched this in the schoolyard and just now.”

His punching motion caused light to scatter and sound to fill the air.

The next thing Galileo knew, he was not moving and the boy had struck his gut with another powerless punch.

“This is the second time.”

“Created Spell ‘February’: Complete.”

“...!?”

Galileo frantically moved back. The boy jabbed his right arm upwards, opened his hand, and clenched it again.

“It looks like you won’t understand if I don’t, so I’ll say it.”

He took in a breath, pulled back his fist, and spoke as if confirming it with himself.

“I will defeat you with the third punch.”

Galileo moved back as if forced away by those words.

...This is...

He moved back and took a defensive stance. At the moment, both Heliocentrism and Geocentrism had been destroyed.

...Interesting!

What was happening? No, more importantly, he felt something resembling surprise or joy. He realized just how far on the “mainstream” side he had been.

And then the boy opened his mouth once more. Galileo waited expectantly for his words. He wondered what kind of non-mainstream thing he would say now.

“It will be too late afterwards, so I will say it now. You have lost because you think of the heavenly bodies as something on a piece of paper, as something flat.”

“Well...”

“Can’t telescopes look straight up?”

That question brought a sudden thought to Galileo.

...Come to think of it, I have not been able to look straight up in the heavens since I started using these things.

He looked up in thought and then something arrived from the sky.

It came from the very center of the sky above. It looked like a dot, but it flew down in an instant.

“Heretic Galileo! You’re mine!!”

It was a half-dragon. He was dressed up as an inquisitor and he was the one Galileo had knocked to the ground that afternoon.

Galileo remembered the noises he had heard from the Musashi before the fight began.

...That was the sound of him being launched from the derrick!

At that time, he had only looked a bit into the air. If he had looked straight up into the heavens, things might have turned out differently.

There were two moons in the sky and a half-dragon flew in front of those two white spheres.

“!!”

And he struck.

Masazumi saw the explosion on the southern side of the land port.

...Can't they keep it a little quieter?

But that might just have been how battlefields were.

...The boys probably love this kind of place.

Beyond the dust and fragments rising into the air, Urquiaga stood up while adjusting the angle of his head. Noriki had gotten on the ground to avoid the blast, but he now moved over to Galileo who had passed out while on his knees. Noriki lightly punched his sheep's horn while an emblem appeared on his right fist. That was enough to knock Galileo to the ground.

"I kept my promise to defeat you with my third punch."

"And that is where our violent teacher told us to punch them."

As Masazumi tilted her head and wondered if that was how it worked, the pope sent a cloud of dust into the air as he ran toward her. He appeared to be ignoring Galileo's situation, but that was the appropriate decision given the overall situation.

He held Stithos Porneia under his right arm as he ran, so Masazumi closed the novel in her hand.

"U-um..."

She was trying to buy time. She only needed to declare defeat once he arrived, but she wanted to hold the pope there for longer in order to buy even more time.

...H-he's going to crash into me!

Just before he stepped onto the battle-scarred ground, she drew back a bit and yelled.

"I lose! This counts as my loss! Um... I admit defeat!"

As soon as she finished speaking, the pope quickly braked. He jammed his shoes into the ground and gouged out an area of dirt almost ten meters long.

While still in his sliding pose, he stopped within arm's reach.

He was right in front of her.

The pope slid into place while almost toppling over forward. He was sweaty, panting, and muttering what sounded a lot like a curse. But he slowly straightened up, turned his back to her, and drank from a bottle of water he pulled out of his pocket.

He began drinking the entire bottle.

"U-um...uh..."

She felt it was none of her business, but she could not help herself.

"You shouldn't drink only water. You need to get some other nutrients."

The pope said nothing in response. His Mouse also said nothing as it looked at him worriedly and wandered back and forth in the air. Once he finished the water, he took a large breath, and turned quickly toward her. With Stithos Porneia under his arm and the bottle in his hand, he still managed to point at her.

"You lose!!"

"Eh? Oh... Yes."

"Listen! First the negotiation and now this! That's two wins in a row for me! Default game settings are best of three, so this is my official victory! Do you understand!? Hm!?"

"Yes," she agreed half in surprised reflex.

...Why do guys get so hung up over wins and losses? ...And wait. Wasn't the negotiation a draw? Does victory go to whoever claims it first?

"And listen up!"

"Eh? Wh-what is it?"

"Girls should dress like girls!!"

...He's lecturing me now!?

"And what are you even doing here!? Why is a young girl who isn't even a

warrior on the battlefield!? You're lucky I'm the pope! If I wasn't, I would have run you down without stopping! Honestly, this is why I can't stand heathens! As pope, I won't forgive you!!"

Masazumi could only bow, but once the pope-chancellor was finished yelling, he turned his back again and started to run off.

"You're going to run again?"

"If I am not around to act as an example for the others, who will!? Well?"

With that said, he shouted toward his allies on the battlefield.

"Listen! Musashi's vice president may have prepared a ridiculous diversion, but she has repented like crazy now that I've lectured her! Those who use the proper methods will always be victorious! And as long as I am with you, you will not lose sight of those methods! Everyone, repeat after me!!"

He began running and raised his speed as much as he could.

"In a world with the Testament, all is filled with justice!!"

His words received a response.

Many voices responded. They came from the K.P.A. Italia students who raised their arms despite being forced back and having their numbers worn down.

"In a world with the Testament, all is filled with justice!!"

"Testament!"

They raised their voices.

"Testament!" "Testament!" "Testament!"

"We act on the words of the Testament!"

"We find our answers in the Testament!"

"We model ourselves after the Testament!"

They gave what sounded like a cheer while the sounds of clashing students continued.

The pope began running even faster as he heard it and Masazumi sighed as she watched him.

...This is crazy.

She heard something being fired overhead, but that brought a question to her mind.

It was odd. Tres España's warriors had been almost completely defeated. Based on what was to come, they would want to find a reason to stop firing and see how things progressed.

The fact that they were continuing to fire meant one thing.

...They think they can win?

As soon as she started thinking about why they would think that, she pulled out her handheld shrine.

"Is this the command center? This is Neshinbara, right? Can you contact Futayo?"

"No... I haven't been able to for a while now. So it's probably exactly what you're thinking. I've sent the Broadcast Committee to check on the situation."

That situation being...

"She has most likely come into contact with Tachibana Muneshige."

The eastern mountain pass heading east from the Musashi and leading to Mikawa had a barrier partway through.

While the Musashi was stopped at Mikawa, the open area in front of the barrier would normally be filled with wagons carrying goods; but that was not the case now.

Two figures faced each other as the setting sun lit the area.

One was a blond man standing at the foot of the mountain and wearing a red uniform and armor. He held a long black and white blade.

"Tachibana Muneshige, 1st Special Duty Officer of Tres España's Alcalá de Henares and Strike Forcer."

The other was a girl standing toward the mountain and wearing a black and white uniform and blue armor. She held a spear.

“Honda Futayo, Temporary Vice Chancellor of the Far East’s Musashi Ariadust Academy and Strike Forcer.”

And the girl asked a question.

“Are you alone?”

“I would not have made it in time otherwise. Are you alone as well?”

“Yes. As I have no friends. That is also why I did not receive any of the chancellor’s ether supply.”

“U-um...”

Muneshige averted his gaze and opened a *cadena firma*.

“Um, Gin. How am I supposed to talk to someone with difficult circumstances?”

“Testament. No girl is more difficult than me. She ranks at about 1/5 a Gin.”

“I see.” Muneshige looked up and finally spoke to Futayo once more. “Why are you here?”

“What do you mean?”

Muneshige tilted his head at that question and he used his left hand to point at Futayo’s spear.

“Tonbokiri is a prototype for the Logismoí Óplo and its cutting ability can cut their power. I believe that divine weapon may have been created as a stopper for the Logismoí Óplo. But in that case, wouldn’t it have been easier on everyone if you had used it to defeat the Papa-Schola’s Logismoí Óplo?”

Futayo remained silent.

After a while, she looked up in the sky and suddenly brought a hand to her forehead.

“How could I be so stupid!?”

“Eh...? Eh...?”

But Futayo quickly lowered her gaze. She brought a hand to her chin, hung her head, and muttered under her breath as if counting something.

“Wait.”

“...For what?”

“Just give me a moment. Yes.”

She lightly stuck her left hand with her right fist and looked back toward Muneshige.

“I have a feeling this arrangement was decided by four-eyes and Seijun.”

“I see.”

“I only heard half of what they said, but I believe they had a good reason for it. In that case, there is a good reason for me to be here.”

“You sure do have a positive mindset.”

“No,” she answered. “I think about nothing but fighting, so my mindset is neither positive nor negative.”

“Do you think you can defeat me?”

Muneshige lightly spread his legs as he spoke. He moved them forward and back while maintaining a gentle width.

“You cannot defeat me in speed. You understand that, don’t you? If so...I will accept your surrender.”

“Unfortunately, having one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings as my opponent makes my blood pump with excitement. Also...”

Futayo lightly spread her legs as well. She also moved them forward and back, but then she leaned forward.

“I was not serious back then.”

“Neither was I.”

“I was at 50%.”

“I was at 30%.”

“No, I meant 25%.”

“I said 15%, right?”

The two of them pulled their weapons back as if extending them.

“Then...”

They slowly began to move as if pushing their bodies forward.

“Now is the time to get serious!!”

Immediately afterwards, red speed and blue speed collided.

Chapter 40: She who Seeks the Realm of Speed

CHAPTER 40

"She who Seeks the Realm of Speed"



I want to think on the meaning
Of that which is gained
By losing something
Point Allocation (Succession)

I want to think on the meaning

Of that which is gained

By losing something

Point Allocation (Succession)

Muneshige heard metallic noises from every single direction.

The wind carried the sounds of attacks, defense, and sparks.

Some were from his strikes and others were from strikes he deflected.

He wanted to avoid clashing weapons as much as he could. Metal was hard, but that was why a nick could lead to the entire blade breaking and a bend might not be reversible.

The Logismoí Óplo were top-class weapons that could repair themselves, but that did not mean he could use it with reckless abandon.

...But I can't worry about that against an opponent like this.

She was fast.

A repeated mixture of high-speed attacks came from every direction.

When he tried to evade, a counterattack would arrive and the butt of the spear would add on yet another attack.

If he moved his right leg out, she would try to cut off that leg. If he moved his shoulder forward, she would jab the spear toward it. If he drew back, she would push forward. If he moved forward, she would deliver a shower of jabs and other attacks.

The speed of her rotation was something her father, Tadakatsu, had lacked.

And the reason for that rotation speed was obvious.

...A shorter spear and frequent use of the butt of the spear.

By rotating the spear like a baton, she could simultaneously attack, hold him in check, and defend. And once some space opened up, she could close that space with a jab. If the spear was deflected, she could reverse the rotation and

attack from the opposite direction.

The shortened shaft raised her rotation speed and allowed her to switch direction more quickly.

The butt of the spear was not an emergency weapon for her. She used it just like the blade, so she could attack twice as often.

...And she uses a spell!!

Shinto spells were based around cleansing impurities. Her spell would purify everything obstructing her speed, allowing her to use the full strength she had obtained in training.

She was likely purifying and reducing air resistance and weight quite a bit. She could raise her pure speed simply by reducing her number of actions.

...Would you call this a chain of attacks?

It could also be called a never-ending series of attacks.

“Did you develop this chain of attacks to battle your father!?”

He put some distance between them with a powerful strike of Lypē Katathlipsē.

“...!”

But she did not respond. As if speaking would obstruct her speed, she kept her sharp gaze on the leading edge of her speed and continued moving.

Occasionally, she would spin her spear from one side of her body to the other in order to raise her attack speed even further. She used the spinning of the spear to gain some distance for her body.

Even her footwork and breathing were synchronized to her forward and back movements. She did not falter in the slightest.

She was fast.

Every motion led into the next and she did not stop when an attack was deflected.

As her blade flew about and landed grazing strikes, several red lines appeared on Muneshige’s skin.

The sound, the sparks, the wind, her dancing black hair, and everything else drew horizontal and vertical arcs.

...But...

As Muneshige repeatedly used compressed contracts in the holy spell activator on his back, scraps of paper and a shimmering of the air scattered from it.

“Surely you can take this even further!”

As Muneshige’s speed began to rise, a twisted feeling filled Futayo’s heart.

She was fully focused on controlling her body.

She had no idle thoughts. All worldly desires could be easily sealed away with training and she always chanted a certain phrase before battle.

...Just resist until you win!

Victory would lead to paradise. In that case, she just needed to keep quiet and win.

But a twisted feeling still arrived in that heart lacking idle thoughts. The feeling had some bitterness to it.

...Here he comes!

Muneshige was raising his speed.

His method was simple. He used a holy spell that produced acceleration.

He would continually reproduce a compressed foothold needed for movement and use it to raise his entire body’s speed.

That method had to produce tremendous exhaustion during battle. Even now, the shimmering of heat was rising from the cross-shaped composite radiator on his back that expelled the heat extracted from his entire uniform.

His method was very unlike Futayo’s. Her exhaustion was purified as a type of impurity. If she raised her speed too much, the purification would be unable to keep up and the exhaustion would begin to build, but she would still have greater endurance during battle.

He used a high output for a quick battle.

She used a low output for a long battle.

That was why she had chosen a battle style including a great number of movements and frequent use of the butt of her spear. Doing so would build up her acceleration and reach her top speed more quickly.

...But...

Her chain of speed was reaching its limit and he was beginning to push back.

She felt bitter.

After all, if he gave no thought to his exhaustion, his speed had no upper limit. If he gave no thought to the consequences and did not worry about damage to his body, he could instantly produce great speed and defeat her.

He was fast.

She recalled that morning when she had accelerated by purifying her stagnation and he had interfered.

The fact that she had not been at her top speed from the first step was no excuse. The same was surely true for him.

...My speed is a direct result of my training.

Her Shinto purification did not strengthen her. It removed the excess and impurities to allow her true strength out. If she had lost, it meant her true strength had lost.

But his spell strengthened him. He was producing something greater than his true strength.

...But I will still win!

This man had fought her father and he was still alive.

...So I will win!

Her father's name meant to 'simply win'.

Her father had helped with the destruction of Mikawa. That destruction had been successful, but his enemy lived.

Had he won or had he lost?

She did not know. She knew the result, but she still did not know what to think.

But there was one way to know.

...I must win.

Then she would learn the answer. And it would feel better than losing and learning the answer.

And so she raised the speed of her chain of attacks. She arrived at the highest point she had reached in her training with her father and Kazuno.

Muneshige judged his opponent as he moved at high speed.

...Can you speed up even further!?

She began to attack even more quickly. Her chain of attacks was already fast enough that he was almost exclusively defending. The color red flew from both of them thanks to scrapes and shallow cuts, but he had more such injuries.

...And her tactics are quite careful.

She had previously lost to him in a competition of speed, so she was challenging him at close range without using her legs much. She would approach and push to prevent him from moving freely.

It was a good tactic.

But, he thought. It is too straightforward.

By using a chain of attacks, each one had to flow into the next.

Her focus on that meant the attacks themselves were less decisive than they might have been. In exchange for a continuing stream of attacks, she could not make her attacks any stronger. She was also worried he would move in toward her, so she was not throwing her weight into the attacks or extending her arms or body for greater reach.

Needless to say, even these attacks were dangerous at the speed she was moving. Even if she could not use a single decisive attack, raising her speed had

made all of her attacks fatal.

...But...

The lack of a single major attack meant she had no ups or downs.

By watching her flowing motions, he did not have to worry about what attack would come next.

He only had to determine when her high-speed motions would send the next attack.

And once he determined that, he had to move. First, he focused on the bottom of his feet.

“...!”

He moved.

He charged directly toward her.

In response, she swung her spear from left to right.

...A good decision.

After all, she held the spear in her right hand. If an enemy charged in from the front and circled to the left, she would need to swing her spear around to her back.

By swinging from the left, she prevented him from circling to her left.

But Muneshige took action against the slash from his right.

“!”

He used his right hand to strike it with Lypē Katathlipsē’s blade.

He swung it left and upwards. Tonbokiri’s blade was deflected into the air and the butt end immediately rotated in from below.

Before the butt end of the spear could arrive, Muneshige ran right and to the front to reach Futayo’s back.

She rotated Tonbokiri vertically with the right side of her body, but this caused a slight delay. After spinning the weapon vertically to hold it in her right hand, she could not immediately attack to the left.

Before she could turn around, he adjusted his grip on his weapon and passed by the side of her back.

It was a simple opening.

To continue her chain of attacks, she had to keep Tonbokiri rotating. That rotation would be used as a jab or slash, but it was a wasted motion until it struck him. A vertical rotation was especially bad. It could not guide the enemy to the left or right and it was difficult to shift which side she held it on due to the weapon's weight.

She used the motion of her opponent deflecting her attacks, so he could deflect it in such a way that she held it on one side and then circle around to the opposite side of her back. He could then do whatever he wanted.

...But that is being too naïve.

Creating an opening like that was an elementary technique.

She was the daughter of the man who had inherited the name of the Peerless in the East. She would have been trained in how to handle this.

As Muneshige circled to the left side of her back, he watched his blade swing toward her.

If all went well, his strike would hit.

“...!?”

But she casually moved her body to the other side of Tonbokiri as it rotated vertically on her right side.

The rotating spear became an obstacle between his blade and her.

He understood what had happened.

She had let go of Tonbokiri as it rotated vertically and she had slipped through that rotation.

It was a simple action; she only had to take a step. That was enough to create a rotating barrier between her back and her foe.

But she had slipped through when it was rotating quickly enough to attack him.

...How much training has she gone through!?

She then took control of the rotating shaft with her right wrist. Using the point of contact between the spear and her wrist, she altered its angle and speed.

It resembled a horizontal backhand that aimed to sweep out his feet as he ran toward her.

“!”

He jumped to the left.

She grabbed Tonbokiri’s shaft as it passed horizontally behind her waist and rotated her entire body to perform the right backhand strike, but he performed a high-speed aerial cartwheel to move behind her.

As he landed, he would swing Lypē Katathlipsē toward her.

Her backhand could not reach him there. The shaft was placed against the back of her waist, so she could not continue the swing.

This was not a naïve opening as before. This one was created by his speed outdoing hers.

But he saw her continue to move. She lowered her hips below the metal shaft that moved behind her in a backhand motion.

Her hands remained on the shaft and she rotated Tonbokiri over her head as she sat. With her waist no longer obstructing its rotation, she spun the spear toward the spot he would land in.

And it was going to hit.

Futayo did not hesitate to act.

She swung Tonbokiri horizontally toward the spot at which Muneshige would land.

Just as she thought she had him, she heard a single noise.

It was a metallic noise.

It was the sound of his feet landing after shrinking his body down as he cartwheeled through the air.

He had landed on Tonbokiri's shaft.

He had shrunk down as much as possible and achieved a grip on the swinging shaft with the soles of his shoes.

"...!"

After landing on the shaft, he turned toward her.

He was about to attack.

She was sitting, so she could not evade.

But she made a certain decision.

"You are mine!!"

As Muneshige started to run along the spear's shaft, he felt something off about his movements.

He was trying to move toward her.

...But the distance is growing.

He was moving away from Futayo.

He had been within arm's reach, but now he was a few steps away.

...What is going on!?

And then he caught on. The socket controlling Tonbokiri's extension was in her hand.

The spear's length could be altered. Its greatest length was six meters and its shortest was one meter.

She quickly extended its shaft as far as it would go with him on top. A distance of six meters would require several steps.

And then he heard her speak.

"Tonbokiri!"

He knew that shout meant she would use the cutting ability.

Tonbokiri could cut anyone reflected in its blade.

He did not know how much it had accepted her, but she could likely activate it normally.

And so he looked behind him. The horizontal blade contained his reflection.

An instant later, he heard her voice.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

It all came down to a series of decisions.

First, Futayo saw Muneshige move.

He bent his upper body as if preparing to dive and collapsed atop Tonbokiri’s shaft.

But he could not escape its blade with just that.

Once it cut, it would all be over.

But she saw him take further action.

While lying atop the shaft, he stretched his right leg back and bent the ankle as far forward as he could manage.

“...!”

He covered the blade with the sole of his right shoe.

With the blade covered by his shoe and his body following the shaft, he was hidden from the blade.

It was no longer reflecting him.

The cutting ability did not activate, nothing happened, and Futayo was dumbfounded.

...It did not work!?

As her confusion created a lethal opening, Muneshige let out a roar.

“I have neutralized its ability after reflecting on my previous failings!”

As he spoke, he gathered up his body.

“...!”

And he ran.

Muneshige ran in a perfectly straight line with the speed needed to climb a wall.

He wielded Lypē Katathlipsē in his right arm, but his enemy was positioned to the left. On his second step, he stood up and rotated his entire body clockwise.

He was positioned for a right elbow jab and he performed a right backhand to slam Lypē Katathlipsē into Futayo who was still sitting.

It hit.

He heard a dry sound resembling breaking bones or snapping wood and the wet sound of struck flesh. Futayo’s body and Tonbokiri were knocked away.

“...!”

As she flew about a dozen meters, Futayo’s black hair trailed after her. With Tonbokiri still in her hand, she and it tore into the ground, rolled, and finally came to a stop.

Following that, the only motion was Muneshige landing with smoke and a shimmering of heat coming from the radiator behind him.

The people saw Futayo as she was knocked away and stopped moving.

Musashi’s Broadcast Committee had pursued Futayo on Neshinbara’s instructions. As soon as they caught up and began broadcasting the battle live, the result had shown itself.

The one left standing was Muneshige.

The students acting as commentators were speechless. Muneshige merely took a deep breath, did not bother wiping away his sweat, and turned toward the Broadcast Committee members when he noticed them.

He held up Lypē Katathlipsē to show them.

“I will now fire on the Musashi with Lypē Katathlipsē. The fleet’s ether extraction and supply will provide approximately 20% power, which is enough to destroy a single ship, so I must ask the residents of Musashi to quickly evacuate.”

He explained what he was about to do and that Musashi had lost.

“Rescuing Princess Horizon will be meaningless if the Musashi cannot depart. We can surround the Musashi and take her back once our reinforcements arrive. That is how this will end.”

He then began walking up the mountain and toward the Musashi.

But he stopped before taking even a few steps.

The Broadcast Committee’s film equipment moved to discover why.

The people watching the scene via sign frames heard a voice before they saw the motion.

“Kh.”

It was half a growl and half a groan.

But the short breath had indeed come from Futayo who lay on the ground in the distance.

“It can’t be.”

The commentators turned to look in the same direction as Muneshige.

Futayo had not moved.

“...Kh.”

But they heard a voice. However, that slowly led to Futayo’s hips rising. Soon she was up on her knees.

“ ... ”

She then collapsed once more, but did not give up.

“ ... ”

She tried to get up again. Her arms, neck, and back moved unsteadily. She had

yet to fully recover from the damage, but she continued moving even when she collapsed yet again.

“Is this...?”

“Yes, Honda-san is still in the fight!” said the commentator.

Futayo almost looked like a shadow as she swayed but still stood up with Tonbokiri in her right arm.

“Honda-san stood up!!”

Futayo used her dim consciousness to think.

Her thoughts were about as clear as when she first woke up each morning. She would suddenly find her thoughts digressing in ways she did not remember and almost forget what she had been thinking about before.

But she knew one thing for sure.

...I...stood.

But she did not quite remember why she had stood, why she had fallen, or why she was here.

...If I fall...do I lose?

She tried to remember how it had been when her father and Kazuno had been with her. That had been training. And during training, falling had meant she lost. She did not recall having fallen recently, but it was not that she had never done so.

But that was wrong.

“It didn’t mean I lost.”

That’s right, she thought.

During training, falling had not meant she would be helped up. It had meant another attack.

...Is that right?

She recalled the times when she had fallen to the ground during training. She

had not been able to use her legs. She had not been able to swing her arms properly. She had known she needed to stand and a spear blade had stabbed toward her.

The clear memory of that sharp blade snapped her thoughts into focus.

...That's right. When training with my father...

She thought and remembered the weight in her hand.

It was Tonbokiri. That weapon was viewed as synonymous with her father. Why did she hold it now?"

"That is because..."

She had gained it after losing so many things.

Her father and Kazuno were gone. She would never train with them again. She had gained enemies, she had gained battles to fight, and she had inherited Tonbokiri. But...

"Ah."

She took in a breath, looked up into the sky, and released a shout toward the ground.

"...!!"

She felt like she was waking from sleep and that was when she truly understood the meaning of loss. Her heart understood clearly how precious the things she had lost were. After casting aside society, obligation, and reputation, she embraced the feeling as an emotion.

"———!!"

She bent her body and raised her voice.

But that voice ended when she ran out of breath.

...My emotions can be stopped by running out of breath!

She took in a breath but did not let out another shout. After all...

...You do not gain a second chance at a first shout.

So instead, she asked a question with her head still downcast.

“Tachibana Muneshige, I would like to ask something.”

She could tell her voice and body were trembling due to the damage she had taken.

“If you continue past here, will the Far East lose its ruler?”

“Testament.”

She heard Muneshige turn around twelve meters in front of her.

That meant he was willing to answer her.

...That is fortunate.

In exchange for losing her father, Kazuno, and the days of training with them, she had gained a battlefield that would answer her questions.

And so she spoke again to the one who stood before her on that battlefield.

“What are your thoughts on the death of the Far East’s ruler?”

“That is what our ruler desires,” answered Muneshige. “And it is a samurai’s duty to give him what he desires.”

“I see. In that case, my father, Tadakatsu, defeated you. After all...” Futayo raised her head and looked at her opponent through her disheveled hair. “The destruction of Mikawa was the desire of my father’s ruler and he successfully protected that desire.”

Thus her father had been victorious.

In hindsight, it was a simple matter. Regardless of the emotions inside her now, her father had remained true to himself to the end. And he had left her with the weapon that was synonymous with his identity.

The rest was easy. She simply had to remain true to herself. And what must she do if she wished to be Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter?

“I have yet to meet her, but the ruler I must serve as a samurai is currently facing an unjust suicide.”

“And what will you do?”

“As you intend to force that suicide on her, I shall defeat you as a samurai of

the Far East.”

She was injured and exhausted, but...

“A samurai does not serve herself. She protects her ruler and gives that ruler what they desire.”

“The ruler you intend to serve, Princess Horizon, might fill this world with war.”

“Ha ha,” she laughed. “That is on an even greater scale than my father’s ruler. Has the changing of the age already made the destruction of Mikawa an insignificant thing? I would expect no less of my ruler. She is well suited to one day rule the Far East.”

Futayo prepared to fight. Without gathering too much strength in her knees, she tensed her thighs enough to show off the flow of her muscles. The crack in her right ribs brought a creaking pain just from breathing.

“...!”

But a sign frame suddenly appeared near her.

“Reinforcements are coming! We’ve gathered everyone we can!”

She saw the Broadcast Committee raise their eyebrows in a smile and clench their fists.

And she heard a voice from the sign frame next to her face.

“It’s me! It’s the other Honda! The idiot has gone to rescue the princess! If you need some of his ether supply, I can have him begin the procedure.”

“That will not be necessary.”

After all...

“Your voices are enough!”

That comment was followed by countless new sign frames opening on top of each other. The second in command of the guard unit, the other members of the unit, Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers, Musashi’s Student Council, and many others she had never met all spoke together with their respective battlefields in the background.

“Go, temporary vice chancellor!!”

She nodded, but did not speak her response.

She simply leaned forward and launched her body in the same direction.

She had lost a lot, but she had gained more than just a battlefield and enemies.

“———!!”

This new emotion produced a shout from Futayo and she clashed with Muneshige.

Muneshige judged his opponent as they exchanged blows and evaded.

...She's slow?

He did not need to ask why. She was injured.

He had run along Tonbokiri and struck her with his full strength. Given their weight difference, she could not have escaped unscathed.

But, he thought. I used Lypē Katathlipsē's blade.

Rotating his body to attack was the proper way of using the weapon. It had been a backhand attack, but the double-edged Lypē Katathlipsē should have sliced through her.

However, she had done the very best she could to evade. She had realized her position prevented her from evading his attack.

...And so she remained crouched down.

She had lowered her body to guide Lypē Katathlipsē's blade lower.

And in the instant the attack struck, she had raised her body.

As a result, the shield at the base of the blade had hit her instead of the blade itself. She had taken the shield attack full on, but it was far better than taking a blade attack.

...That was an excellent decision.

He could sense the high level of Tadakatsu's training. Achieving damage

control by reflexively knowing which part of the body to sacrifice was not taught in the academies. And the effect of that skill was clear. She had taken damage, but she was still moving.

Yet she was slow. She was obviously much slower than before.

...What is this?

Her movements somehow felt faster than before.

She would just barely evade, she would not deflect attacks, and her slashes and jabs whipped up the wind differently from before.

Wondering why, he began watching her movements more carefully. And then he figured it out.

...Her chain of attacks is lacking?

That chain of attacks moved her entire body at high speed. With her exhaustion and pain, a slight distortion should have prevented her from continuing it.

But she was managing. With her exhaustion and pain in mind, she was lowering the number of movements in the chain.

She was lowering the burden. Sometimes she would flow into the next movement in the proper way, but other times she took irregular actions.

But this produced one major result.

...Her chain of attacks is no longer limited to close range! She has added in attacks with a running start!

And there was one other difference from before.

Muneshige was moving his feet less than during their previous clash.

...That is because she is moving more.

She could not rely on her chain of high-speed attacks and defense, so she would move her feet to search out openings and to evade.

In the previous match, she had known she could not outdo his speed, so she had not challenged him in speed. She had moved as little as possible and used her chain of martial arts techniques to challenge him to a close range exchange

of offense and defense.

He recalled the battle she had fought on the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy. Her opponent had danced while mostly remaining in a single spot and she made repeated high-speed attacks that surrounded that opponent.

That had not been a chain of attacks like before; it had been repeated high-speed movement and attacks.

What would happen if she took that speed and added in this partial chain of attacks?

The fact that it was only partial made it difficult to predict and it included heavier hits that used a running start.

“...!”

Muneshige clenched his teeth and made up his mind.

He was outdoing her in speed. He could not allow himself to forget that fact. Whether she had a complete chain of attacks or a partial one, he would win if he was faster.

His divine protection reinforced his physical body, so he could produce as much speed as necessary as long as he was prepared for the exhaustion after the fact.

And so he raised his speed.

Wind and sparks flew in the evening clearing.

The wind was powerful and the scattering sparks decorated the top and bottom of the wind until they vanished into the setting sun.

The sounds were dozens of times as numerous, but a voice suddenly joined them.

“Wow,” said the Broadcast Committee student holding the filming device. “This is even more amazing than before!”

Shadowy afterimages began to appear in the clearing.

The afterimages were of Futayo attacking, Futayo evading, Futayo defending, Futayo spinning around, and Muneshige responding to all of those actions. So many shadows appeared that the word “many” was insufficient. Each time the wind and metallic noises rang out, the clearing was filled with sparks.

Futayo could be seen by her blue armor and calmly fluttering black hair.

Muneshige could be seen by his red uniform and the black and white Logismoí Óplo.

They both attacked head on, attempted to circle behind the other, and avoided receiving an attack from the side.

The ensemble of clashing blades sounded like strange music based in a single sound.

“———!!”

One of them let out a shout and the other replied.

“...!!”

And their speed rose.

It rose, continued to rise, and did not stop.

Futayo worked to continue head on because she felt she would pass out if she lost focus.

Her body remembered the motions.

She had learned these motions when training with her father.

That had continued for over a decade.

She did not think about what she should do. She tried things and learned with her body.

Her training had taught her body what to do and her experience accurately guided her movements.

And so she simply released herself.

How about this attack? How about this evasion? How about this defense?

She tried it all and built up what worked.

She found at what speed her attacks would hit and went with that.

Her opponent had tremendous speed. His reinforced body could raise that speed as far as necessary.

But what did that matter?

Her speed was built upon her training.

Her muscles, balance, and timing were taken to the extreme.

In that case, she could cut away all else.

She would not rely on her spell until she absolutely had to.

She was still inexperienced with her purification and she could only purify a certain amount of stagnation.

If she relied on the spell, the spell's limits would become the limits of her own speed.

...I cannot allow that.

Her father had not been training her in spell usage.

The spell had merely been one part of her combat training.

And yet...

“...!”

She had forgotten that recently. She had felt unease and impatience over having no actual battle experience and she had felt a fear which could also be called vainglory. Those things had led her to show off her spell before she had sharpened her own movements.

...But I lost!

Her spell was not the way forward. She could not win like that. Then what was the foundation of her speed?

...I know the answer!

It was her body.

There was something she needed to do before using the spell to cleanse the impurities.

...I must eliminate the stagnation in my own movements!

She would rely on the spell and then move. She would use all of her training and then rely on the gods.

...Yes, that's right.

She would raise her precision.

She would eliminate the waste.

She would cast aside her hesitation.

She would use her entire body, she would not be bound by her chained-together movements, and she would move with the speed created by her own movements. She would create the extreme form of the movements one could only make after long years of training.

She could wait to ask the gods for help until after doing all that.

"...!!"

If she did that, she would be able to purify all of the stagnation.

If her opponent was reinforcing his body, she would become nothing but speed.

When she took that to its extreme, no instantaneous reinforcement could stand up to her training.

...Go.

She raised her precision and poured out all her strength.

...Go!

Her body could go further. She became painfully aware that she was made of flesh and bone, but that told her she had not gone far enough. She had to sharpen her movements until she felt nothing.

...Go!!

She could not fear her opponent no matter how fast he might be.

“Futayo!!”

She heard a voice. She did not know whose. She did not try to figure out whose. Her eyes did nothing but watch her movements and her ears could only sense the wind.

But the next word reached her ears clearly.

“Win!!”

And she acted to do just that.

Muneshige continually pursued the change in Futayo’s movements.

Her lacking chain of attacks had suddenly grown more honed.

...This is not a chain of attacks!

Her attacks were growing more indefinite.

Her movements were those of pursuit. She was constantly releasing her body’s pent up energy toward a single point.

...But it does not seem to be reaching anything.

Rather than a chain of attacks, she would pursue the attack she herself threw and use that in her next attack.

It looked like her speed was growing with each attack, but that was not actually the case.

She was shedding the excess holding back her attack speed.

To her, the motions of her attacks were honing her speed.

The more slashes and jabs she released, the sharper her movements grew. It was a lot like a baby bird initially being unable to flap its wings properly but learning how to do so as it pecked at the inside of the nest.

...She’s fast.

Her movements looked like she was tearing at the air with a thin blade to create an even sharper tip.

Muneshige responded by raising his own speed. As he increased the pressure

of his spell and a shimmering of heat rose from his radiator, he avoided her attacks and unleashed attacks of his own.

But Futayo did not receive those attacks.

Defense would only be stagnation for her, so she did nothing but evade.

“...!”

And with those evasions, she moved forward.

Muneshige finally saw her directly before him.

She had caught up.

As he moved at high speed, he saw her expressionless face with slightly raised eyebrows. Blood blew into the wind and her hair was a mess.

...But she is not looking at me.

She was looking behind him.

“Is that her intended destination!?”

As if to answer, Futayo tilted her forehead forward.

“...”

She struck his chest as if to shove him out of the way.

And so he took action. He further increased the pressure of his bodily reinforcement and traveled ahead of her speed.

This ultra high speed step back put him in front of her speed so he could intercept her as she approached her limit.

But just as he prepared his stance, she raised her speed even further.

“!?”

In that moment, he saw that the wind, sand, and everything else around her were not obstructing her movements.

...She purified them...

She had been using the same spell the entire time.

But she had been holding it back by focusing on her body's movements.

Now, she released it.

She raised her head in front of him.

Her gaze stabbed into his eyes, but she was still not looking at him.

She was looking further back.

“Kh...”

He knew that the destination of her purification was not where he stood.

It was much further along. That was the location she sought with her true limit based in her training.

“Kh!”

As she approached, she gathered a bit of strength in the right arm holding Tonbokiri.

Muneshige leaped toward her.

He gave a compact swing of Lypē Katathlipsē.

“This ends here!”

And he leaped.

Through the sign frames, everyone saw what happened next.

Futayo walked past Muneshige as he charged in headlong.

The powerfully raised precision of her movements and the chained-together purifications treated even Muneshige as a stagnation and her training provided her with the movements needed to surpass him.

In an instant, her feet planted on Muneshige’s raised knee, the chest of his uniform, his shoulder, and his back.

“...”

And she descended to the ground on the other side.

But everyone saw another movement.

After Futayo passed by him, Muneshige planted his left leg in the air.

“...!”

A tremendous metallic noise rang out and he turned around.

He sacrificed his left leg to kick off the air and rotate 180 degrees.

“Ah!”

The young man in a red uniform let out a roar and leaped with his greatest speed yet.

This should work, thought Muneshige.

Having his opponent step over him had taught him her speed and how she achieved it. And from her countless attacks and evasions, he understood the speed of her attacks.

He was certain that Futayo’s speed would rise even further.

But she now had her back to him. Even if she used Tonbokiri’s long shaft to send a backhand blow behind her, that very same long shaft would be slowed when it reached her body in the middle.

Even if she tried to swing Tonbokiri in her hand, he could attack before it reached him.

“...!”

So he moved forward to hit.

But then he saw Tonbokiri come apart in her hands.

She had removed the expansion device and held only the shaft and blade that formed the spear’s core.

It was lighter and it was shorter. She had inherited this weapon from her father, but to make it her own, she eliminated the stagnation it had contained when she inherited it.

It looked like she was coming to a stop.

“!”

And in an instant, she performed a back snap to send Tonbokiri flying up from

below. The short shaft did not strike her body, the butt end passed vertically below her arm, and she completed a full swing.

Its speed was on an entirely different level from before.

She did not fully turn around for this counter, but the counter itself was directly facing Muneshige.

It would hit him, so he made an immediate decision.

He would use his right leg.

“Go!”

With a metallic roar, he kicked off the air with that leg.

Without thinking, he simply launched himself toward her left side.

He flew, but this would mean he could no longer use his right or left legs.

...But I will win!

He rotated his body and prepared Lypē Katathlipsē. He would strike her with the blade as he passed by her.

She was still swinging up the right backhand, so she had her back to the left.

He would hit.

Futayo took instant action.

As Tonbokiri compactly rotated up and around, she slipped underneath it.

...That is the technique she used when training with her father.

Her body had chosen it almost subconsciously.

She circled to the other side of Tonbokiri and grabbed the rotating shaft in her left hand.

A moment later, Muneshige’s Lypē Katathlipsē reached Tonbokiri.

“!”

And the two weapons struck.

The core of Tonbokiri was slender, so it bent and creaked.

“ ... ”

As soon as his attack was blocked, Muneshige received an attack.

She launched a rapid-fire shower of attacks that exceeded her previous chain of attacks. In an instant, dozens of attacks reached him.

“!!”

The armor on the arms and legs he used to defend shattered and the right arm holding Lypē Katathlipsē broke.

“!”

Lypē Katathlipsē flew into the air.

As he looked up into the air after it, a slash from Tonbokiri fell from above.

If it hit, he would die. What would happen if he died? For him, he would simply disappear. But for the one he left behind...

“...”

As soon as the one precious to him appeared in his mind, his back struck the ground and the blade stopped before his eyes.

Sound returned to his ears.

That sound was the wind and gasping breaths.

“Once you defeated me, you did not finish me off, so I will return the favor.”

He heard her turn around while still panting and he saw her swaying unsteadily, but he remained on the ground.

“Well done. You win.”

“That is not the case.”

He saw her slowly gather the fallen parts of Tonbokiri and rebuild it with her trembling hands. The parts shook and clacked together a few times, but it finally took form.

“You had likely lost from before this battle even began. You may be able to evade the cutting of my father’s Tonbokiri.”

Once Tonbokiri was whole again, she held it to her right.

“But my father had already cut the name of Garcia that refers to your speed.

If it appears that I was the victor here, that is because my father had decided the outcome ahead of time.”

“Are you offering my loss up to your predecessor?”

“You are not one who would lose to one as inexperienced as me.”

“You have my thanks.”

With that one comment, Muneshige closed his eyes. Rather than the intense pain assaulting his body, it was the massive weariness and sense of relief that took away his consciousness.

Futayo picked up Lypē Katathlipsē and held it into the air.

She had won, but she did not know what exactly she had won or what she should do now.

She suddenly realized this had been her first real battle.

The new experience of defeating an opponent belatedly caused her to tremble.

“—————”

She shouted out.

She had learned, realized, and come to know many different things, but she still did not fully understand them. And so she let out a roar.

She recalled what she should do when she defeated an enemy leader.

She raised her voice, raised Tonbokiri, and let her sweat scatter in the wind.

“The enemy leader Tachibana Muneshige has been defeated!”

A short distance away from the land port battlefield, a group of Tres Españan civil officials and students with support duty had been evacuated to the outskirts of Mikawa. Among them, one female student fell to her knees when she heard the report of Muneshige’s defeat.

“Master Muneshige...” she muttered blankly.

Around her, the students began putting together a rescue team for Muneshige.

At about the same time, the Musashi assault team centered around Toori finally arrived at the Tres Españan interrogation ship even as their numbers continued to dwindle. As warriors exited the ship, the Musashi unit formed a half-circle formation to protect Toori as he headed for the Andamio de la Ejecución. The Tres Españan warriors received support from Stithos Porneia as the pope-chancellor ran back and they began breaking into the unit protecting Toori.

The battle over Horizon had entered its final stage.

Chapter 41: Those Facing Each Other from Parallel Lines

CHAPTER 41

"Those Facing Each Other from Parallel Lines"



Wait a sec
What am I supposed to do?
Point Allocation (What do I do?)

Wait a sec

What am I supposed to do?

Point Allocation (What do I do?)

Masazumi stared up into the sky from the western plain that acted as an entrance to the land port.

The Tres Españan aerial ships had stopped firing and were slowly turning and traveling to the southwest.

Similarly, the Tres Españan warriors had parted from the K.P.A. Italian warriors and started to leave the battlefield.

...Was I at least a little useful?

She had negotiated via the command center. Now that Tachibana Muneshige had lost and he could not use the Logismoí Óplo to prevent the Musashi from taking off, she had suggested Tres España should preserve their power in order to protect the pope-chancellor during his return.

After bringing out various conditions and making various compromises, she had convinced them to stop everything but the extraction of the Logismoí Óplo in the interrogation ship.

The command center had sent a transport ship to carry their people back to the Musashi and the Musashi would soon leave and begin stealth cruising. An armed fleet from the Tres España-controlled Tres Portugal had already arrived in the east and it was clear the current situation would not last much longer.

...We need to quickly prepare to withdraw.

She heard repeated heavy metallic noises behind her. When she turned around, she found a red Heavy God of War and a girl equipped with silver chains approaching. Naomasa, the girl with a false arm standing on the God of War's shoulder, spoke.

"We've quieted things down over here. How are things on your end?"

"Stithos Porneia is keeping us from attacking and the pope-chancellor is using

spells like crazy.”

Masazumi followed Mitotsudaira’s gaze and looked forward.

“But it seems Aoi has reached the interrogation ship.”

That was only a guess, but she soon received confirmation.

It came in the form of a sign frame. That torii-style frame appeared in front Mitotsudaira and Naomasa’s faces and it showed a certain scene.

The video came from below the interrogation ship’s bow. Toori stood in front of the Andamio de la Ejecución, which was enveloped in light.

It was being filmed by one of the half circle of students protecting him. It was most likely the Broadcast Committee member in charge of the land port.

And the sign frame displayed a number.

That number gave the time remaining and it was currently at five minutes. At 6 PM, the Andamio de la Ejecución’s preparations would be complete and Horizon would be disintegrated in an instant. The number was likely being displayed as a time limit.

Masazumi lined up next to Mitotsudaira and watched the lowering number and Toori’s back.

“It’s up to you now.”

The area around the interrogation ship was filled with countless sounds.

To sum it up, they were the sounds of the battlefield. They could be described both as lively and as noisy.

But Toori ignored it all and faced forward.

A wall of light lay before his eyes. He thought about touching it, but there was something he had to say first.

“Hey, Horizon! Are you in there!?”

But his shout received no response. Instead, several sign frames appeared.

“Um... Why are you treating this so normally?”

“Just go save her already, idiot. You are wasting both time and money.”

“If you need an extra push, eat some curry.”

“Shut up, all of you! I’m nervous, y’know? Nervous.”

As he yelled back, he saw motion in the light.

The motion had a human form. As it approached, it turned into the silhouette of Horizon in her personal clothes and finally turned into Horizon herself.

...*Oh*.

Only a single wall of light separated them and they were less than two meters apart.

Horizon stood before him. This was the automaton who had gone by the name P-01s until the day before.

When everyone saw her approach, sighs of relief and astonishment came from the surrounding students and sign frames.

In front of him, Horizon tilted her head and held a book under her left arm.

“...? Do you need something?”

“Y-yes.” Toori nodded, stuck out his right thumb, and gave a huge grin. “I’ve come to rescue you!!”

For a moment, Horizon did not react.

After a few seconds of silence, she looked at him expressionlessly as if she had rebooted.

“I will bluntly give the best decision for this situation,” she declared. “Who are you? You are nothing but a bother, so please leave.”

Back in the command center below the evening sky, Neshinbara turned toward all those gathered.

While smiling, he lowered his hands, said “three, two, one”, and raised them.

“Ehhhhh!?” they shouted in unison.

The force of their voices almost caused Suzu to topple backwards, but Kimi

caught her from behind.

“Heh heh heh. Suzu, if it was a shock, feel free to collapse. Look, you have an even better cushion than before.”

“Oh, th-thanks. U-um... Why does...this cushion...feel evil?”

“Heh heh heh. Feel free to call me evil. Yes, I am bad! I am a bad girl!”

“Kimi, I think you should give it a rest, face reality, and watch Toori-kun.”

“Ahh, ahh,” said Kimi as she covered her ears and looked away.

The others ignored her and watched their sign frames.

As Horizon tilted her head, Toori turned toward the screen while trembling.

“Th-that was a close one! Just a bit further and I would’ve felt sad and died just like a rabbit! I-I’ve recovered though, so someone praise me! Bring on the praise! Bring it on!!”

As Toori continued his cries of “bring it on”, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“Tch. So that isn’t enough to kill him. The idiot’s got more endurance than I thought.”

“Whose side are you on!?” he shouted while Horizon once more tilted her head behind him.

“At any rate, I am scheduled to commit suicide, so there is no rescuing me. Please leave.”

“W-wait a second!! H-hear me out!”

As Toori frantically turned around, Horizon nodded expressionlessly a few times.

“I have determined you are a stubborn person.”

Everyone in the command center hung their heads and exchanged glances.

“I get the feeling they have terrible compatibility. If I did a Schwarz Techno fortune telling, I’d probably get ‘go die a painful death’.”

“You’re right, Margot. It would lead to a murder. With a Weiss Techno fortune

telling, it would probably be ‘could you perhaps go die’.”

“After seeing this, I bet a normal confession would have failed too.”

“Okay, okay!” shouted Toori. “That’s enough fun fortune telling results and thoughts on the past! This isn’t over yet! I can still make a comeback! I’ll make back double what I lost!!”

As Toori spoke, Horizon tilted her head and turned her back. Everyone in the command center saw her disappear behind the light as if to say the conversation was over.

“You idiot! Behind you! Behind you!!” they shouted.

“Eh? Huh? Oh? Hey, Horizon! I’m not done talking!!”

“To be honest, I see no purpose in speaking any further. It would accomplish nothing.”

She did not even return to the wall of light, so the command center group hung their heads again.

“Seeing a final boss this wonderful makes me want to pay out some money,” said Shirojiro.

“Hmm. Final bosses in games these days tend to be logical, but for some reason won’t let you settle things with money.”

“I am starting to wonder if that idiot did something to her in the past,” said Urquiaga.

“St-stop giving your thoughts and figure out a way to deal with this!” shouted Toori.

Everyone in the command center used their sign frames to exchange glances with those on the battlefield and then they all nodded.

“How about you apologize?”

“W-wait a second! Why are you assuming I did something wrong! And Horizon! I was a customer at your shop! Can’t you at least greet me!?”

A few seconds after his complaint, Horizon arrived once more and bowed expressionlessly.

“Thank you very much for your patronage, but we are currently closed. ... Now, then.”

“You’re welcome. ...Don’t leave!!”

“What is with you? This is unreasonable.”

That last word caused everyone to look toward the ground once more, but Toori was not discouraged.

“U-um, I was a customer and I went quite a lot. A-are you sure you don’t remember me?”

“His method of picking up girls is worse than a porn game protagonist,” commented Ohiroshiki.

“Eh? Eh? I just got here,” said Azuma. “Can someone explain the situation?”

“W-well... I-I think it...might be hopeless...” explained Suzu.

“What happened to all my allies!?” shouted Toori. “Is no one on my side!? Where did this cruel atmosphere come from!?”

Horizon suddenly untilted her head.

After a moment, she lightly struck her left palm with her right fist.

“I just remembered. You are the customer who would often come during my morning shift.”

“Y-yes, yes! You remember!? Ohhh! I’m so lucky!”

Toori turned toward the sign frame and pointed at it with a triumphant look.

“Did you see that!? You did, didn’t you!? That’s right! You and you and you! My uncontainable charm creates such harmony in people’s memories that... um...well, you get the picture! Do you get it now!?”

“Why is this idiot always so hard to look at? Is it because he is poor?”

“Hm... I think it’s just that his soul’s blood pressure is high.”

“In novels and plays, this kind of character always loses in the end.”

“Oh? Oh? What are you all saying?” he started again. “Heh heh. I can handle this much scorn just fine! After all, Horizon understands me! Isn’t that right,

Horizon!? You remember me, don't you!?"

"Judge. I also remember speaking with the owner of the shop about you."

"For real!? You gossiped about me!?"

"Judge. I told her there was a boy who always held my hand when I gave him his change. I said his hands were always sweaty, so the owner of the shop gave him the Urban Name of Wet Man."

"Sorry, but that's kind of disgusting. I'm Schwarz Techno disgusted."

"Yes. And I'm Weiss Techno disgusted. We should have kept him confined yesterday when we had the chance."

"How did he think he could confess to her after doing that?" asked Urquiaga.

"Wh-what's with all of you!? What's wrong with wanting to touch the girl you like!? Just like this!"

Toori reached out toward Horizon's chest, but Horizon quickly spoke up.

"I failed to mention earlier that this wall of light will supposedly instantly kill anyone who touches it."

"Ohhhhhh! And my fingernail was just about to touch it!! Tres España, why did you create such an exciting contraption that sounds like something an elementary school kid would think up!? Is it cause you're perverts!? Murderphilia is just the worst!"

Toori turned back toward Horizon and spoke as if only just then noticing something.

"What the hell!? Tres España! Doesn't the inquisition normally chain people up while naked!? This isn't right! This isn't right at all! Keeping everything decent is the worst!"

"You have now said perversion and decency are 'the worst'. Please stop holding double standards."

"Horizon, have you never heard of flip-flopping? ...Ah, I'm sorry! Don't leave! Please don't leave! L-look, I brought a letter for you! Here, I'll read it. Um... 'What I Want to Do – Asama Tomo'."

“Waaaah!” shouted someone back at the command center. “Why do you have my essay with you!? Read any further and I’ll shoot!”

“Shut up!” shouted Toori as he returned the essay to his pocket.

“What is he doing?” muttered everyone else.

However, a small laugh came from the command center.

Everyone turned toward it and found Kimi pressing the back of her hand to her mouth to suppress her laughter.

“Oh, sorry,” she said once she noticed everyone watching her. “But doesn’t this exchange seem familiar?”

She spoke quietly as if seeking confirmation.

“That’s Horizon, isn’t it? Yes, that exchange is definitely Horizon.”

Masazumi was watching the situation through Mitotsudaira’s sign frame.

“Really?” she asked.

Mitotsudaira simply stared at the sign frame as if waiting for what Kimi would say next, so Masazumi stopped speaking as well.

“Isn’t that right? If you do not whitewash your old memories and do not naively think anyone my foolish brother would confess to is ‘normal’, this should not seem out of place. You should remember there used to be two people who spoke like this.”

“She might be right.”

Masazumi thought she sensed some disappointment in Mitotsudaira’s voice as the wind whipped at her hair.

“What do you mean?”

“It is an issue of the right person for the right job. There used to be a foolish boy who would do nothing but cause trouble for everyone around him, but he was able to continue acting so foolishly because there was a girl by his side who that foolishness had little effect on. There was just the one girl who could get the boy to listen to her.”

“She was an obedient girl,” continued Kimi. “She would always read books in some corner or another, but she would reach out a hand to anyone in a bind and she was truly harsh on my foolish brother and only my foolish brother.”

“That’s right,” said Urquiaga. “Whenever Toori would make a gag, she would expressionlessly ask him to explain what about it was supposed to be funny. It was truly frightening.”

“Yeah...”

For some reason, everyone hung their heads and nodded.

“She was really harsh on him.”

“W-well, Kimi is right and it did seem like she was trying to kill Toori-kun, but you all know how important he was to her, right? So it must be the same for this Horizon.”

“It’s possible the only reason she seems the same now is because she was a very automaton-like girl back then,” warned Mitotsudaira.

“Then...” said Asama.

Mitotsudaira nodded and the two of them spoke in unison.

“That automaton might be able to fill Horizon’s role perfectly.”

“That’s right,” muttered Toori on the battlefield.

“To be blunt, I do not understand what exactly you are saying is ‘right’.”

“Just wait there. I’m gonna rescue you now.”

“Do you not understand that my death is best for the world?” she immediately replied. “I wish for the best choice which will not inconvenience the world, so your intervention is not needed. That is the correct answer.”

“What?”

Toori crossed his arms behind his head and looked at Horizon.

“I don’t care what it means for the world. It would inconvenience me if you died.”

“A question: which is more important, you or the world?”

“Which do you think?”

“To be blunt, the world.”

“That settles it.” He took in a breath. “I just have to become a king who rules the entire world. Isn’t that right?”

In the many places around the world where the divine transmission reached, those who were interested in him watched and listened.

“With your Logismoι Óplo, saving the world from the Apocalypse and becoming the king of the world isn’t just a dream. And the Logismoι Óplo are your emotions, so we can bring back your original self if we gather them all.”

So...

“I will... Are you listening? I will – definitely will – conquer the world with you. We can free everyone from the Apocalypse and flirt a whole bunch while I take back everything you lost because of me.”

He then addressed all those listening.

“So I have something to ask of you, world. You only have to do it to deal with the apocalypse, but could you give me your Logismoι Óplo? If you say no, then let’s fight a war. And if you don’t like the word ‘war’, it can be a fight, a clash, a confrontation, a negotiation, or whatever else. I don’t care what method it is. If it gives you a reason to hand over Horizon’s emotions, anything’s fine.”

Yes.

“Let’s take Shintoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, the Anglican Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, Dunhi, Oat, Technomagie, sword fighting, martial arts, gun fighting, mechanical horses, mobile shells, Gods of War, mechanical beasts, mechanical phoenixes, mechanical dragons, aerial warships, humans, non-humans, normal citizens, knights, vassals, samurai, ninja, warriors, kings, nobles, rulers, sovereigns, emperors, popes, the Far East, K.P.A. Italia, Tres España, Hexagone Française, England, Sviet Rus, P.A. Oda, Qing, the Indian Alliance, money, authority, negotiations, politics, the will of the people, military

might, information, divine weapons, Logismoι Óplo, Testamenta Arma, the Five Great Peaks, the Eight Great Dragon Kings, Chancellor's Officers, Student Councils, men, women, those who aren't either, the young, the old, the living, the dead, the Musashi which can confront you with all these powers, our feelings, our reasons, our thoughts, your feelings, your reasons, your thoughts, and everything everything else that I don't know about," he said. "And then we'll see who's the strongest."

Masazumi gasped.

...That's crazy!

This was the worst possible time to be instigating a war. The Testament Union and all the other nations would grow cautious and become their enemies. And yet he continued speaking.

"Whether it's resolved peacefully or by force, the one who wins in the end is king of the world. After all, he'll save the world from the Apocalypse."

The idiot had linked ruling the world with saving it from the Apocalypse.

"What do you think?" asked Mitotsudaira with a smile and with the sounds of battle behind her. "You have most likely joined the most worthwhile academy in the world."

Masazumi was unable to respond, but Toori's voice continued.

"How about we play by those rules? In other words... Huh?"

...What has him confused now?

As she watched him through the sign frame, he hesitantly glanced over and tilted his head a few degrees.

"Huh? Um, I was trying to confess, so why am I announcing plans for world domination? Huh? This makes no sense."

"Think before you speak!!"

Everyone single person on the battlefield, enemies included, shouted at him. Horizon then gave a confident nod.

“I see. I have determined that reasoning is clear and easy to understand.”

“Eh!? For real!?”

“Ahhhh! Don’t encourage him!!” shouted Masazumi.

But...

“But to judge fairly, that is your reasoning and not mine. As we hold parallel views, this is ultimately a nuisance for me.” She shook her head. “Please leave. I wish to avoid harming the Far East with my existence.”

“Even if I say I don’t want to lose you?”

“Why do you not want that?”

“Eh? W-well... Um... Saying it in public is embarrassing.”

“Stop that bashful fidgeting!!”

After Masazumi’s comment, Tenzou appeared from the right side of the sign frame. He was initially in hiding, but he soon showed himself.

“Toori-dono... Huh? You still aren’t done? H-hurry up and get out of there! The pope is enjoying himself so much we can barely hold him off. Reel her in! Reel her in!!”

“What, are you here to make me rush this? Fine then.” Toori took in a breath and spoke clearly to Horizon. “There’s a lot to it, but it of course comes down to the fact that I love you.”

The girls at the command center let out excited cries.

But Masazumi heard Horizon nod twice a moment later.

“Judge. I am truly sorry, but as an automaton, I have no emotions and cannot understand what you mean. Please leave.”

“Waaah!” everyone shouted. “After all this, she turned him down!!”

At the command center, Suzu collapsed once more.

“H-here, Suzu-san. Th-this cushion isn’t evil.”

“Heh heh heh. This shrine maiden has a shock-absorber on her chest. And

what do you think? Doesn't she seem even more Horizon-y than before?"

"Y-yes, I agree. I never thought her ability to handle Toori-kun would increase this much."

"I-I won't lose!" yelled Toori. "If I gather the Logismoι Óplo, your emotions will return. When that happens, I'll make you regret what you just-... no! Bad words! Anyway, uh, sorry. Give me another chance."

"Oh? Now you are behaving more modestly? An excellent decision. But it is no use because I will die."

The conversation seemed confusing to all the others, but Horizon simply glared at Toori.

"Also, I have never heard of someone confessing to an automaton before. I am a doll, you know?"

"D-don't be stupid! You really are stupid! I'm A-OK with an automaton!" Toori spread his arms. "I wasn't so sure myself when I first saw you, but when you bring food out to people at the shop, you crouch down like this to pick up dropped spoons, right?"

"Checking my memories, I would indeed crouch like that."

"Yeah. Well, one day I realized I was instinctually peeking between your legs from a low interior angle. My instincts didn't care you're an automaton. And when Mitotsudaira let me fondle her bra-less chest, I learned I have no problem with a hard chest! It'll totally work!!"

"St-stop spreading lies!!"

Horizon ignored Mitotsudaira's interruption and nodded expressionlessly.

"Ha ha ha. To be blunt, you are the worst."

"It's over," muttered someone and everyone hung their heads in agreement.

But then they heard Horizon speak once more.

"I have determined that you and I currently hold parallel views."

For some reason she looked somewhat relieved.

"We are parallel, so I say this: please leave."

Masazumi looked up in surprise when she heard that.

“Aoi!!” she suddenly shouted. “Don’t give up!!”

...If their views are parallel...

She had to tell him that she knew what Horizon wanted.

She understood and so she opened her mouth to speak.

However...

“Don’t worry, Seijun. I understand too. This is where we wear down each other’s arguments, isn’t it?” he said. “We’re parallel, so I say this: I will bring you back with me.”

Toori took a step forward and stood as close as he could to the wall of light without touching it.

Horizon approached as well and she spoke.

“We are parallel, so I say this: there is nothing we can both agree on.”

He opened his mouth to reply and gave an “um” of thought.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I know something I can get you to agree to.”

She continued.

“We are parallel, so I say this: there is nothing you can do.”

He followed.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I think I can do something for you.”

She answered.

“We are parallel, so I say this: I desire death.”

He replied.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I want you to live.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: I do not have a human life.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I know you have a human soul.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: automatons have no emotions.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I will return your emotions.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: this is all meaningless.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I don’t think anything about you is meaningless.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: an automaton’s decisions are perfect.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: I don’t think your decisions are perfect.”

At that point, Horizon let out a sigh.

“We are parallel, so I say this.” She let out a breath. “I do not want to hear your answers.”

In that moment, Masazumi shouted from an end of the battlefield.

“Aoi!! Don’t let her go!!”

She then heard him slowly speak as if checking over his own words.

“You don’t want to hear my answers?” he said. “But that is just another way in which we are parallel.”

So...

“So I say this as your parallel.” He took in a breath. “I want to hear your answers.”

Horizon responded to that with a simple nod.

It was a deep nod of approval.

“Judge.”

And she looked up.

Everyone in the command center silently watched their sign frames.

On those screens, Toori’s body relaxed as he stood before the nodding automaton.

“Um,” he thought while Horizon was visible through the light.

“She is waiting to see what he will ask her, isn’t she?” commented Asama.

True enough, Horizon did not urge him to speak or ignore him. She stood without moving.

“Go ahead. As we are parallel, I have an obligation to provide an answer to what you will say.”

“Is that so?”

Toori nodded before continuing.

“It’s all parallel,” he began. “So I say this: your decisions are perfect.”

And...

“We are parallel,” she began. “So I say this: I must be wrong.”

That statement of her own error caused everyone to gasp.

“Automatons always make the best decision, so why would she say she’s wrong?”

“It’s the nature of automatons,” said Neshinbara. “Automatons respond with the best decision. That is why Ariadust-kun says her death is the best option for what she should do here. But the best decision is not necessarily the decision the automaton originally wanted. There would have to be several other options below that best one.”

So...

“She may have been waiting for someone who did not follow the best option which she was powerless to resist, who would not be persuaded, and who would convince her to give up. ...And that idiot realized it.”

And her answer was...

“When dealing with someone who won’t go with the best, giving the opposite of the best becomes the best.”

The conversation on the divine transmission continued just as Neshinbara had indicated.

It seemed to work back through the previous exchange.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: you think everything about yourself is meaningless, don’t you?”

“We are parallel, so I say this: I do not want to think that everything about me is meaningless.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: you might not actually have any emotions.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: I believe I do have emotions.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: you might not actually have a human life.”

“We are parallel, so I say this: I have a human soul.”

“We’re parallel, so I say this: you desire death, don’t you?”

She responded.

“We are parallel, so I say this: I want to live.”

He answered.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: you think there’s nothing I can do, don’t you?”

She continued on.

“We are parallel, so I say this: there is something you can do.”

So he did not stop.

“We’re parallel, so I say this: there is nothing we can agree on, is there?”

She opened her mouth, took in a breath, and spoke as if pleading him.

“We are parallel, so I say this: I know something we both agree on.”

“And?” asked Toori. “Where is that, Horizon? Where is the point that these two parallel people can agree?”

“Judge. That would be the place where parallel lines cross and differing thoughts converge,” she answered. “That would be the borderline.”

Toori ignored the sounds of the battlefield and everything else as he asked a question.

“And do you not want to go to that borderline?”

“No, I do want to go there.”

“Do you not want me to take you there?”

“No, please take me there.”

“I see. But I thought there was nothing I could do?”

“No, you can do anything.”

“I see. Will you not let me fondle your boobs later?”

“What in the world are you talking about?”

“Th-that’s what you really think! I got an honest answer instead of a parallel!!”

Comments started arriving via the sign frame.

“You need to die.”

“That really wasn’t the time for that.”

“Listen. If I display it on a graph, your value started to rise and then plummeted.”

“Sh-shut up, all of you!” he shouted back. “Wait. Are you mad, Horizon? You are, aren’t you?”

“Do not decide things for me. Let me be very clear: I am not mad at all.”

“You’re definitely pissed!!”

However, Horizon remained standing on the other side of the light and she clasped her hands together.

“You are intent on rejecting everything I say, aren’t you?”

“You can reject what I say, hit me, and play the role of tsukkomi all you want.”

“In that case,” said Horizon. “The best choice is for me to be the ruler of the Far East. However, I also wish I could have been a snack shop worker. What do you have to say to that?”

Toori tilted his head.

“Hm?”

He tilted it further and finally spoke.

“I know. Even if you’re our ruler, you can still work at the snack shop.”

After all...

“I’m chancellor and Student Council president, but I do all sorts of stupid stuff.”

Hearing that, Horizon opened her mouth and nodded.

“Judge! To be honest...”

She nodded even more vigorously and gave voice to her thoughts.

“I want that to be the best choice!”

Toori nodded in return and a smile spread across his face.

“Yeah. So do I, Horizon!”

Toori immediately pointed at the wall before him.

As Horizon looked at him curiously, he smiled at her.

“Hey, this wall’s in the way, isn’t it? Or would you prefer I didn’t destroy it?”

“It is not in the way, but please destroy it. Or do you not want to be here with me?”

“I want to be with you. I want to be all over you!”

“You are the worst.”

“You’re the best.”

He held up his left hand. His left shoulder moved a bit awkwardly, but the pain was gone and his body was beginning to forget the past. He clenched his fist.

“How do I destroy this wall? Or is it just an illusion?”

A female student’s voice came from the speaker on the wall within the Andamio de la Ejecución.

“That wall recreates the sin of whoever touches it and uses it to kill them.”

“And how do you destroy it?”

“You cannot deny a sin from your past, so you can only die.”

“I’m asking how to destroy it. Please, I don’t have much time.”

The clock on the sign frame was down to one minute and was closing in on half of that minute.

“The wall itself is not solid. If you touch it and deny the sin from your past, you will reject the ether making up the wall and it will vanish. But that is something no one can do.”

Suddenly, the wall of the battlefield audibly collapsed.

“Quit wasting your time and accept your judgment! Isn’t that the normal thing to do, hm?”

The pope-chancellor had used repeated spell attacks to break through the Musashi students who had been focused on defending. He smashed the repeated spell shields and limitless defensive divine protections that the students gained from Toori’s ether supply.

“No one has touched that wall and returned alive! If death is seen as the end of the performance, it is your duty to the world to let the curtain close with your judgment!”

“Hey, everyone,” said Toori as he reached for the wall without turning around. “Stop that guy. He’s keeping me from flirting with Horizon.”

“Damn you!”

Innocentius produced spell light from the charm floating alongside his Mouse and he raised Stithos Porneia.

“Any power you might use to destroy that wall is an attack! In that case, I can stop you with Stithos Porneia!”

The bell-like sound of Stithos Porneia activating rang out and the air was split in a straight line.

“!?”

But once the sound of shattering glass followed it, everyone changed what they were doing.

The unusable weapons of the Musashi students produced noise.

“Is this...?”

And they came together while showing no sign of coming apart once more.

Stithos Porneia was no longer active.

“I cut it with Tonbokiri.”

At some point, a female warrior had appeared amid everyone else. She was catching her breath, kneeling, and holding a spear. Her clothes were cut all over, leaves and branches had caught on her, and cuts decorated her skin.

“Honda Futayo, Temporary Vice Chancellor of the Far East’s Musashi Ariadust Academy. I have arrived in response to my ruler Horizon Ariadust’s desire to live!”

Even after speaking, she did not stand. She had to have run full speed across the mountain between the land port and the eastern mountain barrier. It was similar to a sprinter running a long distance.

She could not move. Innocentius realized that and frowned once he noticed Lypē Katathlipsē on her back.

“Retrieve that, Tres España!! It belongs to you! And our troops are not to let the Far East have the power of a deadly sin either!!”

The enemy let out a cry and approached. Futayo groaned as she tried to stand up, but her knees gave out.

“Protect our commander!!”

The guard unit charged forward, surrounded her, and defended against the enemy.

All of them were injured and deeply exhausted, but they had come this far as Musashi’s guard unit.

And...

“Today, we have gathered all our Chancellor’s Officers. This is a good day!”

Mitotsudaira drew midair arcs with her silver chains and both Noriki and Tenzou lined up to strengthen their defenses.

Futayo looked up in surprise and found the second-in-command and all the others forcing smiles.

“You are being reckless,” she said blankly.

“Don’t say that. The Far East has lasted 160 years, so what’s another thirty seconds or so?”

That produced a shout from Innocentius.

“Then I request a confrontation! I will settle this in a confrontation with Musashi’s chancellor!”

“You must first defeat me, the vice chancellor!”

Futayo raised her voice while supported by all the others. Her expression was one of pure exhaustion, but she smiled a bit when she looked at the others around her.

“Sorry. I made you worry for me and support me, but I cannot even rely on you here.”

But...

“I too can easily last another thirty seconds or so.”

When the temporary vice chancellor declared she would buy them some time, Innocentius gnashed his teeth and Toori smiled.

“Mr. Pope, this won’t take long, so just wait there.” He pointed at Horizon. “And I have a prior engagement with her, so surely you can wait until that’s over. Of course, if you want to flirt with me that badly, I’m willing to hear you out.”

Everyone watched Toori’s hand.

The finger pointing at Horizon was sticking into the wall of light. It stabbed right through it and pressed against Horizon’s chest on the other side.

Everyone froze in place, Toori looked over at his hand, and they all yelled in unison.

“Sexual carelessness!?”

Immediately afterwards, Toori vanished from before the wall.

He had been thrown into the space the wall had created to recreate his sin.

Chapter 42: Those Facing Each Other on the Borderline

CHAPTER 42

"Those Facing Each Other on the Borderline"



And I prepare myself
As I do that
What will you do?
Point Allocation (Remorse)

And I prepare myself

As I do that

What will you do?

Point Allocation (Remorse)

Toori smelled vegetation.

He heard people cheering.

The people lined either side of a road paved with fake wood tiles.

...This is Remorse Way.

He then noticed his own form.

As he stood in the middle of the parade on Remorse Way, he was his current self.

However, he recognized this parade.

“This is when Horizon died.”

His greatest sin was being recreated.

“This is when I let Horizon die.”

He then heard a voice from the opposite side of the road.

“This is when...I died?”

He looked up in surprise and saw Horizon standing on the other side of the crowd. She too was in her current form.

“Why are you here? Oh, is it because you love me so much!?”

“To be blunt, I do not think so. To be even blunter, I believe it is because someone touched my breast when he could have just touched the wall all on his own.”

“It’s something that simple?”

“Who can say? However, I can determine that this was entirely out of my control.”

As Horizon spoke, a familiar small form moved past Toori.

...!?

Toori gasped when he saw the boy rushing toward the academy to the stern of the ship.

“What is it?”

“I just saw my father’s mother’s son’s wife’s grandkid’s father.”

“Calculating it out, that would be you. Where are you headed?”

“W-well...”

Toori started walking with little enthusiasm; but his pace quickened as his memories grew clearer, and he felt something heavy in his gut.

He passed between and behind the people of his memory, who did not notice him.

“Up ahead, you’ll be hit by Lord Motonobu’s carriage and killed.”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t save you.”

“No, not that. Why was I in front of my father’s carriage?”

“Breakfast.”

“What?”

Horizon tilted her head and lined up by the road up ahead.

“After you lost your mother, you started living with us. You were really shy at first, but you gradually got used to it. On this day, my sis had an event to take part in so she left for a different parade without making breakfast like usual. I was supposed to make breakfast instead, but...”

“But?”

“I overslept. When I woke up, you had already made it and you were preparing to go see the parade with me.”

Toori averted his gaze, but...

“Do not worry. I am looking at you.”

“Are you?” said Toori as he looked back at her. “The food wasn’t any good and I said so.”

“That is...only natural.”

“Yes, but you started crying and you ran off.”

As he faced forward, his former self was pursuing an unseen Horizon.

It seemed Horizon had wandered aimlessly while crying. A lot of people knew her, so Toori had been able to follow the trail of people who had seen her.

“But you were too late?”

“No, that isn’t how it happened.”

Toori saw it.

Directly in front of him, her former self stood in the middle of the crowd. When she spotted the former Toori, she turned her teary face toward him.

“...!!”

But she frantically moved further into the crowd of people.

“You ran from me.”

Toori slowly followed the version of himself that began running even faster in his surprise.

“I thought I had made you hate me by rejecting what you had worked so hard to make,” he said. “I thought you were running from me because I was chasing after you after making you hate me.”

He arrived at the space in the crowd through which their former selves had passed.

“...Oh.”

As he stepped in, all the surrounding motion slowed. As if it was all underwater, everything moved gently and almost seemed motionless, but it did not actually stop.

He made it through the crowd obstructing the way and entered the empty

space in the middle of the road.

A carriage pulled by four horses was on the road.

The carriage appeared to be stopped.

A black-haired girl stood stopped in front of the carriage and she was looking back with her eyes wide.

A boy was leaping forward with his arm reaching for her.

The recreation of his sin was reaching its conclusion in slow motion.

Beyond that motion, the current Horizon looked up in surprise.

“Your hand!”

He looked down and realized the end of his current hand was disappearing. It was turning black like a shadow and the shape of the fingers was no longer visible.

Ah, this really is my sin, he thought as he watched himself disappear.

“I made you hate me, so you wouldn’t have died if I hadn’t chased after you.” He smiled. “But even if you hated me, I could have saved you if I had some power. I couldn’t even do that, so I really am an idiot who can’t do anything.”

He faced forward.

...But...

“Looking at this, there was no way I could have saved you. I’m jumping toward you, but I’m just too far away. I’d always suspected I was an idiot, but it looks like I really was.”

“You certainly are calm about all this. You will be dead soon and it will probably kill me as well.”

“If so, I’m really sorry.”

Toori circled around his former self and crouched down for a better look.

“Please stop trying to look up my former self’s skirt.”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“White or black.”

“Wow, you really are the same person.”

As Horizon glared at him, he stood up and tilted his head.

“This is really well-made 3D. It’s based on my memories, but does it also draw out residual traces of the past from the ether of the area? They could make some great holographic porn using this, but Tres España made this instead. Talk about a bad business decision.”

“Isn’t standard 2D good enough for that?”

“Don’t be stupid. You can look at things from different angles with this.”

“I see. After giving it more thought, this does indeed provide quite a bit more information. Now, I would like to focus on a more pressing issue: how do you plan to deny this?”

Good question, he thought.

Suddenly, his body shook and the destruction of his arm picked up speed.

Also...

“Horizon!”

Her right arm also started growing shadow-colored.

“It appears the time for my disintegration has come. What do you have to say about this?” she asked. “Is our borderline a place where we disappear together?”

Toori faced forward.

He wanted to do something, but when he looked at their former selves, he saw himself unable to reach her.

...This might be hopeless.

There was simply no way.

He could not deny the scene before his eyes and say his sin had never happened. He had to accept it.

...Then am I just going to give up?

If he felt sadness now, he would die. If he gave up and admitted she could only have died and that he had killed her, only death awaited him.

Dying with her was something he had been unable to do before, so was that their borderline?

...What is it?

But then he heard her speak as she was destroyed.

“I have a blunt question. Why did you fall in love with my present self?”

Toori tried to scratch his head when he heard that question.

...I can't do that with this hand anymore.

He used his other hand and realized they would not last much longer.

“At first, it was your overall atmosphere. Y’know, just your general behavior. It was possible your build was what your past self would’ve looked like grown up and your behavior was similar. Masa was actually the one that suggested it to me, but I began to wonder ‘what if’.”

He took in a breath.

“When I heard you were practicing to make breakfast, it really surprised me.”

“I have no memories, so comparing it to that incident is meaningless.”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t have to do with memories. I wondered if you were the kind of person who would want to work hard and make breakfast for someone.”

So...

“If it tastes bad, it tastes bad, but I wanted to respect that desire to accomplish something. It’s the same as how I can’t do anything but I still want something. So if there was someone who was working hard to accomplish something...”

He was unsure how to put it into words.

“Well, I wanted to be by your side while you were trying to do that, Horizon.”

“I see.”

Then...

“I have no memories of the past, but why did your former self fall in love with my former self?”

“Well...”

“My present self will give you the best answer I can find. If the reason your former self wanted my former self is the same as the reason you want my current self...” She spoke decisively. “Then even for my former self, you were a reliable partner who could deny me from a parallel position.”

“B-but...”

Was that really true?

“Your former self ran from me.”

“According to my memories, humans do not want to be seen by others when they cry. I do not understand it myself, but when they feel embarrassed, they wish to hide.”

“...”

“My former self was confused by your rejection and ran away, but I have determined she was not running from you after you found her again. Based on my best reasoning, she was embarrassed she had run crying from you and so she tried to hide from you. Most likely, she wished to stop crying and then greet you with a smile.”

“Why?”

“It is a simple matter,” said Horizon. “Once she calmed down, the shock of having her breakfast criticized was a trivial matter, but she felt she had wronged you by crying. And so as not to wrong you any further and to be an equal partner, she wanted to smile when she saw you again.”

Horizon faced him from the opposite side of her former self.

“We are parallel. When you tried to save my former self, I can guess what you said to her.”

He remembered that very well.

“I told her I was coming.”

And the words from his parallel had been those of rejection.

“And my former self must have told you not to.”

Then...

“I...” he started.

But Horizon corrected her posture, shook her vanishing hair, and stood tall.

“We are parallel. And that is exactly why I told you *not to come to me*. If we are to arrive at the borderline together, what must you say to me? Give me your answer.”

Toori looked at his former self. He was desperately trying to save the girl.

He could never reach her, but he was still trying.

...I'm an idiot who can't do anything.

He truly could not do anything on his own.

But he was no longer on his own. He had been saved by so many people to make it this far.

“Horizon,” he said. “I have one thing to say in order to deny the sin of my past. I may not be able to save you on my own, but...”

He reached out his vanishing hand and spoke to Horizon.

“It's dangerous there. I'll go to save you, but while I do, you come to me, Horizon.”

“Yes.”

Horizon gave a small nod and Toori noticed that the former Horizon's right hand was slightly raised.

He focused on that hand that had a toy ring on it.

...She's trying to reach toward me.

She had not hated him. He decided to believe that.

And just like her former self, the present Horizon reached her disappearing hand toward him.

As their hands vanished like shadows, they intersected.

“!!”

Like a wrapping whip, their vanishing hands regained form and grasped each other.

“...!”

While bringing his own body closer, he also pulled her in toward him.

And she leaped toward him.

They pulled each other close, embraced each other, and clung to each other as they met in the center of Remorse Way.

“...!!”

As soon as they did, the recreation of his past sin shattered along with all the light.

Everyone on the battlefield watched as the light was destroyed and scattered about and as Toori and Horizon stood in the center.

Amidst the remains of the light which danced about like flower blossoms in the wind, Toori opened a sign frame in front of Horizon. She nodded and placed a finger on the sign frame.

As soon as she did, Masazumi’s voice came from every sign frame on the battlefield.

“Horizon Ariadust, ruler of Mikawa, has accepted her admission into Musashi Ariadust Academy! As such, she is under the protection of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers and this battle has no reason to continue!! Papa-Schola! We hope to hold an official confrontation at a later date concerning the return of your Logismoí Óplo!” She took a breath. “And we will leave the reconciliation of all subsequent conflicts to the Peace of

Westphalia!!”

Wind blew through the sky as a Musashi transport ship flew in from the north. As the black and white ship flew at extreme low altitude, its front hatch was open and Naomasa’s Jizuri Suzaku was already inside. The side hatches were also open and nets were lowered from them.

“Retreat!! If we don’t hurry, Tres Portugal’s armed merchant ships will arrive from the east!”

That announcement spurred everyone to begin running. The action moved south and the movement of the transport ship meant they had only once chance at this.

Those with the ability leaped directly into the front hatch and those with some time to spare held back their pursuers and then grabbed onto the nets. Jizuri Suzaku had already gathered the injured and loaded them on board, and Mitotsudaira was rather carelessly gathering those leftover.

But Toori and Horizon were delayed due to being the furthest south. Toori had stopped as if he intended to remain on the battlefield, but Horizon tugged on his hand.

“Toori-sama, given the situation, I have determined we cannot obtain the other Logismoi Óplo here.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t make you lewd.”

“That’s not the point!” shouted everyone in the sky. “And either way, we’re out of time! Hurry up!”

That was when a roar came from the pursuing K.P.A. Italia soldiers.

“You really think we’ll let you go!? Hm!? And don’t think you can just admit your princess to the academy like that! Don’t forget that a field trip isn’t over until you get home! That doesn’t take effect until you return to the Musashi, you fools!”

A beam of light shot from diagonally below the transport ship.

The pope-chancellor had activated about a dozen charms and fired them all at the ship.

Amid the roar of the attack, Toori reached out a hand while embracing Horizon, but the net was knocked out of reach.

“———”

And then the K.P.A. Italia soldiers rushed in.

“If we gave up here, we could never face K.P.A. Italian history again!!”

But there was motion within the great din.

Jizuri Suzaku leaned out of the ship’s rear hatch, it held Persona-kun, he held a chain, that chain’s owner dangled down and lowered another chain, and someone was attached to the end of that chain.

“It seems it is finally my time to shine! I have lowered my moisture to raise my solidity!”

Nenji had transformed into a hand as he swung from the chain.

“...!”

His body threatened to collapse, but he endured and caught Toori and Horizon.

And he grabbed them.

At the same time, the ship ascended and turned, spinning and drawing up the chain in the process.

With the sound of the rushing wind, the ship headed for the Musashi.

Innocentius chased after the transport ship.

But he could not catch up and it pulled away.

“Shi-...!”

Just as he was about to swear, another loud rumbling came from the side.

“!?”

He turned around and saw his own ship, the Regno Unito, was rising and moving forward. It had already risen about a dozen meters and was forcing itself forward. With large ships, ascending and advancing simultaneously could

throw off their output balance, but the ship was taking that risk.

“Why!? What do you think you’re doing!?”

His first response came from directly to his side.

“Th-the captain and the upperclassmen said they would pursue them on their own.”

He turned toward the voice and found the girl who had been in charge of divine transmissions on the deck.

And she was not alone. A group of several hundred had gathered and all of them were freshmen or close to it.

A voice came from the ship leaving all those young students behind. It was the older captain who was in charge of the command center.

“Your Holiness, we are borrowing the ship.”

“What is the meaning of this!?”

“As long as you live and remain on the battlefield, K.P.A. Italia and Catholicism have not lost. Catholicism has persisted throughout history because the glory of the pope has never been hidden. It has always been allowed to shine.”

So...

“We are borrowing the ship. With the large ether cannon on the front and our own efforts, we should be able to stop the Musashi.”

“Are you going to return it?”

“Testament. As long as we dedicate our Catholic bodies and souls to the Testament.”

“Testament. Then go.”

Innocentius adjusted his posture, raised his eyebrows, and raised a hand toward the Regno Unito. He saw someone in a window raise a hand in return.

“You all carve the name of Catholicism into this era and I’ll make sure it persists to the next. All follows the guidance of the Testament! Amen!”

“Your consideration has left us overjoyed!”

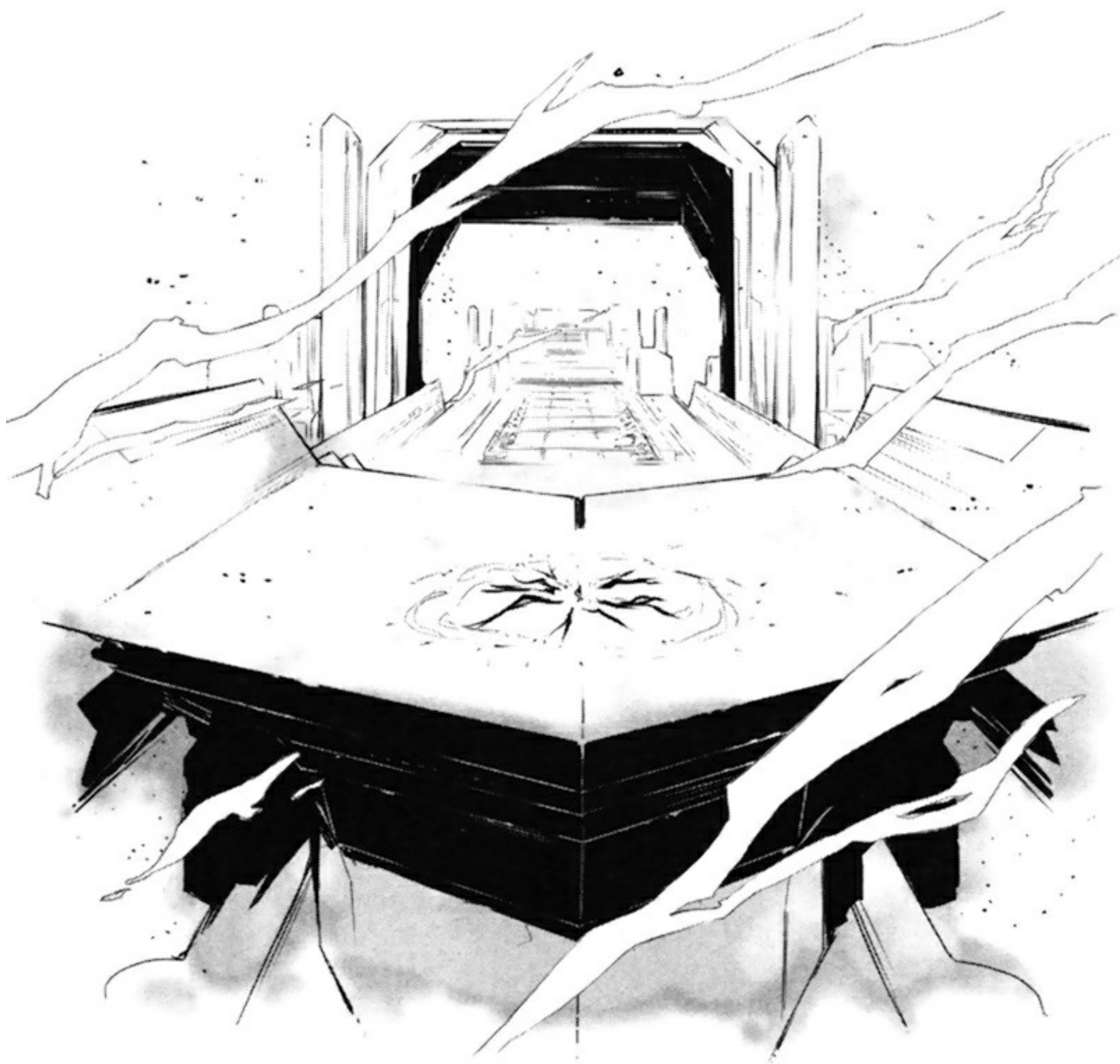
Regno Unito quickly moved forward.

“We have much greater power, so we can overtake a transport ship carrying a heavy burden! While the princess is being lowered to the Musashi, we will approach and fire our ether cannon!”

Chapter 43: Continuous Adherent

CHAPTER 43

"Continuous Adherent"



When someone moves forward
What is the driving force behind those who receive them?

Point Allocation (Emotion)

When someone moves forward

What is the driving force behind those who receive them?

Point Allocation (Emotion)

The giant white ship with the name “Regno Unito” on the side travelled through the sky in which the Musashi floated.

Its mobility was one of the foundations of its usefulness as a *corazzata*.

It would use that high speed to plow its ram into enemies and then fire from that position. Aerial tactics had long been based on the massive and unstoppable weapon that was a *nave*.

As the white ship approached the Musashi, the ram at the front was aimed at the Musashi’s first starboard ship.

When raising its speed and ramming them, there was no need to target the center of the enemy and the Musashi was created from eight smaller ships. Destroying even one would greatly diminish its ability and that specific ship was a cargo ship, so its destruction would prevent them from travelling too far without resupplying. They would eventually have to stop.

And so the white ship continued forward.

They did not use any of their cannons or other equipment that would use the ship’s *etere alimenta*. They poured it all into propulsion and the 3 meter caliber ether cannon attached below the ram.

Once they arrived within three kilometers, the Musashi became visible as it floated up above the mountain.

“It’s huge.”

Someone muttered their astonishment, but the Regno Unito did not slow down. The Musashi looked like a rising mountain, but they sped up in a direct line toward it.

The Musashi started to turn so that it faced west.

Water sprayed into the air from about halfway down the giant ship and a line

trailed after it.

The ship was sliding to the side as it turned, but its own weight made it a slow process. They had likely started the turn while rising, but the actual motion of the ship had only just now begun. However, the Regno Unito could not make large course corrections either. The Musashi's bow was now at too acute an angle for the ram to hit.

But even so...

"Hit them!!"

Even the pressure of the wind caused the white ship to creak as it accelerated.

The Musashi transport ship which had gone ahead now gently lined up to their left. They had caught up to it.

"Here it comes!!"

Musashi's students could be seen clinging to walls and ropes inside the opened hatches of the ship. The scene wobbled as it drew closer.

"!!"

And it struck.

The creaking intensified, sparks flew, a rumbling began, the clouds split, and armor scattered.

The screech of metal continued on and on as the collision continued and the impact assaulted both ships.

However...

"How dare you touch His Holiness's ship with your heathen ship!!"

The ether light from the white ship's rear accelerators strengthened as it accelerated.

The Regno Unito sped up as if forcibly peeling away those clinging to them.

In the instant they pulled away, a cry rushed from one ship to the other.

"Bind, Tonbokiri!"

A female warrior held a spear in the center of the open hatch while all the others supported her.

The cutting power caused the white ship to shake violently. Its armor split and the outer shell of the hull burst off along a straight line.

The inner shell bulkhead was now exposed and the transfer pipes inside the outer shell had been broken or bent. The leaking water and *etere alimenta* created a mist in the air.

The mist wrapped around the Regno Unito's port side like smoke.

But the light of acceleration continued and wind spread out like waves.

"Farewell!!"

The Regno Unito moved away from the transport ship all at once.

With less than a kilometer to go, the ram had been diverted a bit to the right; but it could be corrected.

Shinagawa, the Musashi's first starboard ship, had not managed to turn in time.

"All hands, brace for impact!"

Just as that announcement filled the ship, the navigator gave a confused report.

"Asakusa, the enemy's first port ship, is turning to the east!"

All of them wondered why it was not turning west. After all, Shinagawa and all the other ships were turning in that direction.

As they wondered why, something arrived from Asakusa.

A group of straight lines was fired from every point along Asakusa. They looked like white beams of light, but they were actually ropes.

Some were meant for mooring, some were meant for towing, some were meant for transporting, and others had other purposes. Some were fired from the derricks and deck and others were thrown by Gods of War. Ultimately, all of them flew through the sky and reached the Regno Unito.

"It can't be!"

The ropes had metal hooks and anchors on the ends. Some of the ropes wrapped around the ship, some caught somewhere along it, and some stabbed into it; but almost all of them grabbed onto the white ship in some way or another.

“They’re trying to pull us off course!!”

And that was exactly what happened.

The ropes pulled taut and began to groan. The power at the other end tugged on the Regno Unito.

“Oh!”

And they altered its course.

But the Regno Unito accelerated and continued forward to snap the ropes or remove their foundations so they flew off into empty air.

“Ohh!!”

The Regno Unito twisted and groaned as it sought the front of Shinagawa.

And then the derricks broke. Two of the four on Asakusa broke at the foundation and one had the arm extending from the mast snap off.

“Shit!”

As everyone on Asakusa cried out, the ropes snapped like a tearing perforation.

The white ship twisted as it continued on with what looked like countless harpoons in its side.

“———!!”

But it did not make it. As Shinagawa turned its bow, the white ship’s port side crashed into its armor and gouged into it but then scraped along it and passed by.

“...!!”

The Regno Unito was pushed out of the way.

The outer edge of Shinagawa’s port side was badly torn up, but the difference

in mass had deflected the white ship.

With the sound of two bundles of metal crashing together, Shinagawa and the Regno Unito were repelled and moved apart.

The Regno Unito turned hard to the right so it did not capsize, and then it faced forward.

Musashino, the Musashi's first central ship, was there.

Damaged and with capturing ropes trailing from it, the white ship charged forward with a smoke-like mist rising from it and armor fragments scattering about.

The Regno Unito faced the Musashino which could be called the Musashi's flagship and it opened the hatch to the ether cannon below the ram.

"Fire while we ram them!!"

It charged right down the enemy's throat in an airspace in which no one could stop them.

"For the continued glory of Catholicism, K.P.A. Italia, and the Papa-Schola!"

As it went, it fired.

At the same time, someone passed over it and arrived at the Musashi.

The transport ship passed over them, a chain dangled down, and two people stepped down onto Musashino's bow.

They were Musashi's chancellor and the princess who ruled Mikawa.

They held each other's shoulders as they faced the light of the ether gathering in the Regno Unito's cannon.

The two of them supported what the princess held in her right arm.

"This is the Logismoι Óplo 'Lypē Katathlipsē'."

A moment later, the two blasts crashed between the two weapons.

The clash of power began with both sides equal.

The ether cannon's beam produced a steam-like sound and the tearing of

Lypē Katathlipsē resembled a gathering of black lightning. They struck in the center and created an explosion of spiraling light and darkness.

The white attack attempted to burst through. The repeated black attacks circled around and tried to pierce through. A tearing sound filled the air with the wavering of heat, a clear sound filled the air with a chilly fog, and an explosive pressure became a field producing a distortion in the power of ether.

The air shook and the wind wrapped around the two ends. One end was Horizon standing on the front of Musashino. Toori supported her from behind as she held Lypē Katathlipsē as if pushing it forward.

“Kh!”

Lypē Katathlipsē shook and raged. It roared as if trying to cry and scream.

...Can I control it!?

Horizon did not know what this weapon meant to her, but it had automatically activated as soon as Futayo had given it to her before.

“Owner : Horizon Ariadust : Confirmed”

**“Individual Emotional Expression : Normal Drive – Overdrive : ——— :
Combat Proof Able : Resolving Self Evolution”**

The two layers of safeties and the initial settings had all been carried out automatically.

...I can't feel its weight.

It apparently had a weight of about seven kilograms when held by Futayo or the others, but it felt light to her. It felt no different than carrying a glass of water.

When they had seen the white ship named Regno Unito complete its preparations to fire, Toori had made the decision.

“Let's shoot like crazy! It'll feel great, Horizon!”

She did not quite understand.

...But if the Musashi cannot fly, everything will return to how it was.

Neshinbara and Masazumi had backed the decision because having her settle

this would show her power to the other nations.

And so she had arrived here.

For a while now, sign frames had been appearing and disappearing between her and Lypē Katathlipsē. According to Futayo, that had not happened when its previous owner or she had held it.

That may have meant it truly was Horizon's.

However...

"Toori-kun! Lypē Katathlipsē is being pushed back!!" came a report over Toori's sign frame.

"Eh? Th-then w-we need to push back."

"A quick question," cut in Horizon. "Why are you squeezing my butt?"

"We're seriously in trouble, you two!"

As the voice from the sign frame said, the wind before them was being pushed their way. As black and white clashed, their black was clearly weaker.

The ether fuel gauge on Lypē Katathlipsē still had red remaining.

"Individual Emotional Expression : Overdrive : Output : 60"

But the output would not rise above sixty.

"Horizon-sama : Please Release the Third Safety 'Soul Activation' "

...Soul!?

Her soul was in her throat, but what did it mean to activate it?

She understood what a safety was from cooking tools and fire spells. By releasing it, the object's true function could be used. That meant this Logismoι Óplo used her soul as a safety.

...If that is not removed, I will lose!

But she did not know how to activate her soul.

Meanwhile, the white light approached and threatened to envelop and crush them.

...I will lose.

She thought about what would happen if she lost.

...I will disappear.

She thought about disappearing.

She stood an instant away from that happening, but her gaze moved toward the world beyond the clashing white and black.

Below the evening sky, she saw mountains, a bay, and the ocean.

...That bay is where my father died.

She understood what the word “father” meant. The night before, he had died and his authority had transferred to her.

But she did not understand what it meant to lose him.

She did not know what emotion to feel when she was told she had lost him.

But she still looked back in her memories.

“ ...”

She had seen her father recently.

Yesterday when she had been singing in the graveyard, someone had seen her from a ship flying overhead and they had waved at her. She had waved back, thinking it was the polite thing to do.

...That was my father.

He had smiled when he saw her, yet she had not known who he was.

If she had known he was her father, how would she have responded?

If she had known he would die that night, what would she have done?

“...!?”

She heard a light noise in her heart. Or she thought she did.

An instant later, she understood the tremendous fact that she had lost someone precious.

“Horizon!”



Horizon Ariadust

And she understood the meaning of the awkward yet powerful strength embracing her shoulders.

“Don’t worry. I’m with you!! Aoi Toori is with you!!”

For the first time, she understood what it meant to have someone with her.

So she raised her voice. As if giving herself into what was spilling from her eyes, she let out a cry to reach her father’s smile from the day before and to express the meaning of the one who stood by her side and supported her now.

“———!”

She dedicated it all to the sky with her crying voice.

“ ‘Soul Activation’ Safety Release : Confirmed”

A great number of sign frames opened all around her.

The black sign frames were made from both crosses and torii. Instead of scrolling text, they initially showed a small shadowy image and the text appeared an instant later.

“Logismoι Óplo Control OS : Phtonos-01s : Initial Connection : Initialization : Confirmed”

“Welcome to the Genesis of Emotions – Go to the Middle of Nowhere”

...What is this?

Horizon saw countless lines of text scroll past at high speed and a new sign frame appeared.

“Fifth Weapon ‘Lypē Katathlipsē’ : Confirmed”

As she held Lypē Katathlipsē in her right hand, it began emitting black light.

New sign frames began to appear around Lypē Katathlipsē and they displayed the process for securing power and firing.

“Ether Fuel Compensation : Searching : Supply From Toori-sama : Accept? Y/N”

Horizon turned her teary vision toward him and he nodded, so she reached out and pressed the “Y”.

As soon as she did, the black light exploded out.

“!?”

Lypē Katathlipsē’s black tearing doubled. The claws grew sharper and longer. The movements of the fingers grew deeper and more piercing.

Thousands of black fingers wrapped around the white light. They turned their claws back toward her, but then...

“Dig in!”

Exactly that happened as the giant beam of light was torn into.

The recoil reached her. As if sorrow was pressing down on her, all strength left her body and she began to tremble.

The sounds surrounding her resembled weeping and wailing and she realized the same sounds existed in her own chest. Her throat trembled and she thought it would burst out, but a strength supported her from behind and she heard his voice.

“Sing, Horizon. Sing the song that will grant us passage!!”

She knew what song that was, so she opened her mouth. Her throat trembled, but she used that emotion along with his support.

“—————”

She raised a voice into the sky that was approaching night. She sang the same song she had presented to the sky when she had met her father. She sang slowly but loudly.

“Let me pass, let me pass

If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?

This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven

Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here I have come to celebrate this child’s tenth birthday

By dedicating these two talismans

Going may be easy, but returning is frightening

Can I pass despite my fear?”

Her ringing song overlapped with the cry of sorrow as they stabbed into the sky.

In an instant, the black claws tore through the sky as lightning, devoured the light, and pierced through.

“!!”

She arched back and let her hair fly as she cried into the sky. As that cry came to an end, the attack broke through the white ship.

That giant ship that resembled a white whale was destroyed. It shook as if punched and it fell from the sky.

Musashi ascended and she received the white ship from Musashino’s sharp bow.

“...!”

The ship was sliced in two from bottom to top.

Sounds of destruction, great impacts, fragments, light, and smoke came from the two sinking halves.

Evacuation ships spilled into the sky from the halved white ship, but the Musashi did not even look back as it ascended and turned to the west with its few injured on board.

The ship’s bow held a girl crying into the sky and a boy embracing her.

As she looked into the dark sky, Horizon threw Lypē Katathlipsē to the deck.

Trembling overcame her body and an emotion in her chest shook her more than she could bear.

She forcefully turned her lowered head toward the boy behind her.

Obedying the question filling her heart, she asked him that question with her forehead pressed against his chest.

“Why...?”

She sobbed and weakly beat his chest. She took in a breath and opened her mouth wide.

“Are emotions really this painful!?”

The boy did not immediately reply.

Down below and quite a ways behind them, the remains of the white ship crashed loudly into the land port.

Amid the rumbling and slight wind that caused, Horizon felt his arms reach around her shoulders and to her back.

“Cry, Horizon,” he said in that light embrace. “I’m here with you, so let out that painful emotion.”

“Why!?”

“That’s simple.”

She heard him speak.

“Once you get everything back, there will only be happy things left for you. So for now, enjoy this painful thing with me.”

“———”

He smiled a bit.

“Listen. I can’t cry anymore, so you cry and weep for me. And...”

He held her more tightly and she raised her head.

His lips reached the corners of her eyes that were wet with tears. She closed her eyes and let him do what he would. His lips wiped away the tears in both eyes and then they lowered.

“———”

They covered her lips.

He left them there for a few breaths, but finally, slowly removed them.

He remained close enough to exchange breaths, he looked her in the eye, and he spoke.

“You taste like sorrow, Horizon.”

“Then,” began Horizon as she looked at him through slightly-teary eyes. “Will you teach me what other flavors there are?”

He deeply embraced her once more. He held her tightly as if pulling her into his chest. Above that chest, he lowered his head and nodded.

“I will. I’ll return your emotions. Let’s go find the deadly sins that bring you together and let’s gather them on our borderline. If we do that...”

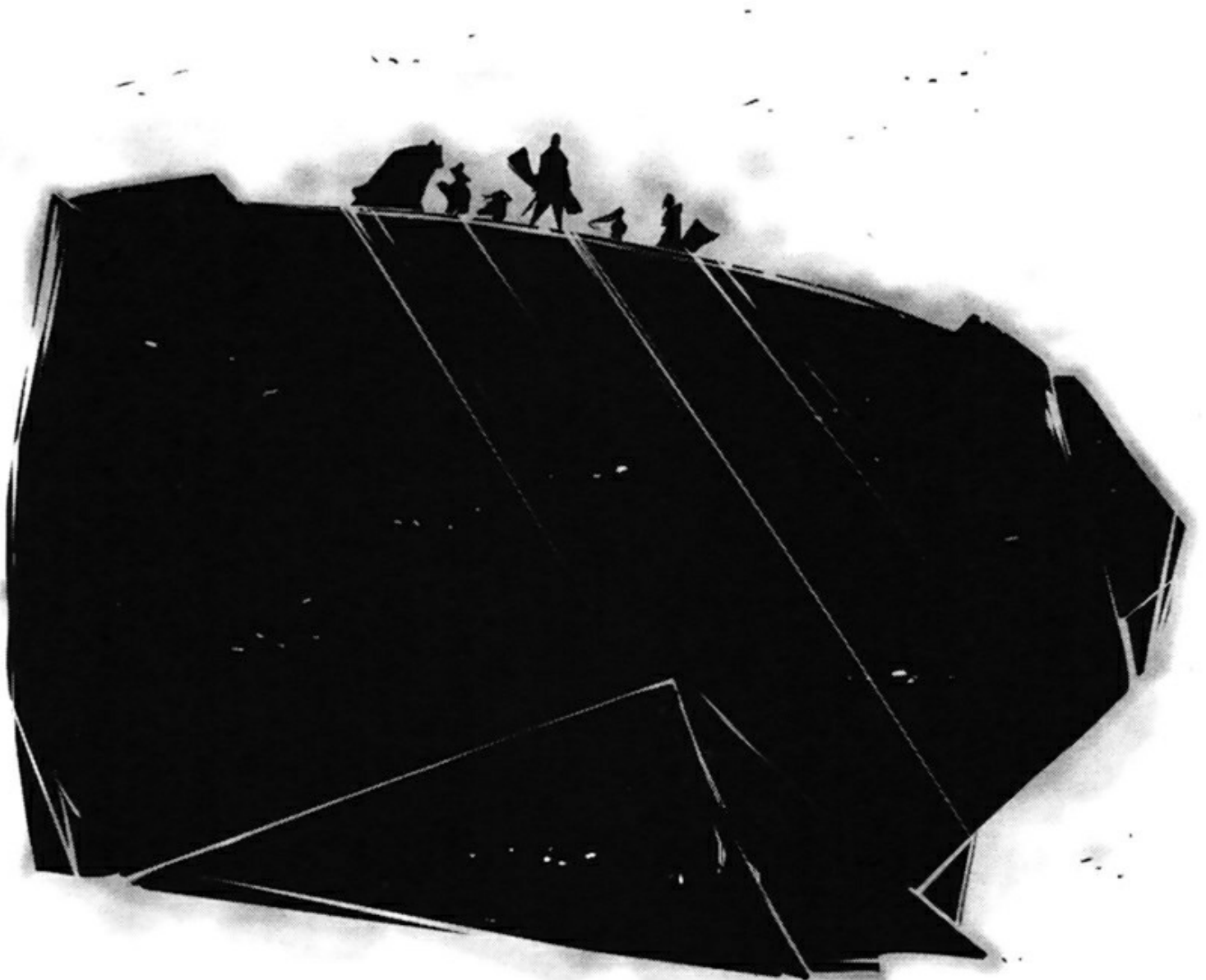
If they did that...

“You can follow all your emotions and smile along with me, Horizon.”

Last Chapter: Myself From Now On

LAST CHAPTER

"Myself From Now On"



Can I look forward
To tomorrow?

Point Allocation (Everyday Life)

Can I look forward

To tomorrow?

Point Allocation (Everyday Life)

Three figures stood on the large road at the bottom of the staircase leading from Musashi Ariadust Academy.

One was bent-backed Sakai and one was Oriotorai with her giant sword on her back.

“Oh, my way home is this way.”

And the last was Sanyou who bowed and headed toward Takao while almost staggering.

The white-dyed sky proved they had completed the transfer to stealth cruising. The darkness of night surrounded them and the streetlights were lit, but Asakusa, Shinagawa, and Musashino were as bright as midday.

Sakai and Oriotorai slowly walked down Remorse Way to reach the bow.

“Asakusa and Shinagawa were both damaged and Musashino’s bow needs a full inspection.”

“But listen to that metal music. They’re holding a festival on Musashino.”

“They can have tonight to celebrate. I know you’re planning to throw them right back into your lessons that might as well be combat training tomorrow. Makiko-san, I’m a bit interested in your history.”

“I’ve never done anything too exciting. The kids in my class are a lot crazier than me.”

“Really?”

Sakai tilted his head and Oriotorai crossed her arms behind her head.

“Take Toori’s family for instance. Apparently, the Aoi family was originally in charge of protecting the Ariadust family. They were powerful but had no surname, so they were given the surname Aoi which points to Matsudaira.”^[5]

“Why do you know that?”

Sakai looked puzzled, but Oriotorai stuck her tongue out a bit.

“Let’s just say it’s part of my unknown history. Anyway, it seems Toori and Kimi don’t know about that; and it seems their parents tried to raise Horizon like a normal child after the Ariadust princess died.”

“But then she was lost and once she returned she was an automaton meant to resolve the Apocalypse. I wasn’t sure when I saw the automaton, but I think Toori was stupid enough that it convinced him completely.”

“That idiot went to confess and ended up announcing he would take over the world. I’d say they’re a lot alike.”

Oriotorai realized Sakai had suddenly stopped walking.

“...Principal? That’s Horizon’s monument.”

As she spoke, she realized why he had stopped.

A different color had been splattered on the dimly lit wooden tiles of the ground. The color reflected the streetlights.

“Blood?”

A design based around a circle and some writing filled up about half the road.

Oriotorai gulped and reflexively reached for the hilt of her sword.

“That’s the Double Border Crest.”

“You know about it? ...Am I completely unnecessary? Was all that with Sakakibara a complete waste of time?”

“Don’t be silly. My students were talking about it. I need to call in Neshinbara and Asama.”

As soon as Sakai nodded in agreement, he heard a sound in the sky.

What sounded like an amplified version of a dog howling in the distance was actually the ship’s alarm.

Oriotorai lifted her sword from her back without bothering to remove it from the scabbard.

“This is ‘Musashi’ with a warning for the entire ship! A single aerial warship is passing overhead to our starboard side!”

Before the warning had even finished, the lights illuminated something as it arrived in the sky.

The large aerial ship was over 800 meters long and it pierced their stealth barrier to show itself. They could see the color black and...

“That’s the emblem of P.A. Oda! It’s one of Oda’s iron ships! Did our course happen to coincide with its own?”

“No. The number on the side is 1. That ship belongs to Shibata Katsuie, top of P.A. Oda’s Five Great Peaks. They wouldn’t travel on the same course as us by accident. Most likely, this is a greeting. Look, Makiko-san.”

Several figures were visible on the rear deck of the black ship.

There were six of them and they all had different builds, heights, and hairstyles.

“Those are P.A. Oda’s Five Great Peaks who have begun conquering different areas from the Far Eastern side.”

“The fourth Great Peak is jointly held by Sassa and Maeda, so they’re also known as the Six Heavenly Demon Army. The meaning is a bit different than the original term, though. ...This must be a demonstration to show that P.A. Oda can analyze our course even if we use stealth cruising.”

“All of them are true monsters worthy of the title of demon, aren’t they? Hashiba, their #6, even has a private army of young warriors known as the Ten Spears.”

The aerial warship passed through the sky with no lights of its own. Without a single evasive maneuver, it passed by as if staring down at the Musashi. The wind whipped up and lights and voices came from all across the Musashi; but the black ship ignored those actions and continued on.

As the six figures were taken into the distance, they headed inside their ship without bothering to look back.

The ship broke through the stealth barrier and entered the sky behind the

Musashi.

“———”

For just an instant, the external sounds rushed in and the two moons could be seen in the sky behind the black ship; but then it all vanished along with the ship. The stealth barrier recovered and only dim white remained in the sky.

Relief filled the actions and general atmosphere of the Musashi.

Oriotorai let go of her sword's hilt and faced forward.

“Oh, it's vanishing...”

The crest of blood was disappearing as it soaked into the plastic ground that had excellent drainage and cleansing properties.

But the writing on the ground was still legible, so she read it slowly.

“Please...”

The message was in English.

“Please kill me all.”

Below the dim light of the sky, someone in a black school uniform and someone in a blue dress walked down the nighttime street.

The black one suddenly looked back at the festival lights rising relatively high above Shinagawa.

“Even with the guests of honor gone and P.A. Oda's threat, the festival is showing no sign of stopping. The people of Musashi either really love festivals or are insane. Don't you find this odd, Mitotsudaira?”

“You have been complaining a lot, Masazumi. Shirojiro and Heidi are managing the festival and ‘Musashi’ and the others are analyzing P.A. Oda's course. They might have been here to celebrate our victory as well, so we need to keep the right atmosphere.”

“Really?” muttered Masazumi. “Anyway, we need to get to the Blue Thunder and pass a message to Aoi and the others since we can't seem to contact them.”

She suddenly placed a hand on her hips and twisted a bit.

“I’m still not used to wearing a girl’s uniform on the bottom.”

The fact that she was a girl had reached pretty much everyone and they had accepted it, but she had switched to a girl’s uniform because continuing to wear a boy’s uniform could spread suspicion again.

...But I never expected the girls from our class to get all excited and have one ready for me in the middle of the festival.

However, her chest would stand out in a girl’s uniform and that would weigh on her heavily, so she had compromised by wearing the top of a boy’s uniform to hide her chest.

The skirt would coil around oddly, so she had removed that. But then the brown inner suit would show off the lines of her legs too much, so she wore a black inner with a pocket binder attached.

She hoped she would gradually grow accustomed to it.

...At least a girl’s uniform can’t be pulled down all of a sudden.

As she walked down the road in that strange new uniform, Mitotsudaira would not stop smiling bitterly.

However, Masazumi felt that bitter smile was a welcome thing.

“So what happens now?” asked Mitotsudaira suddenly.

“Eh? Oh. The Musashi is already traveling west and we will continue that way. Tres Portugal has a port on the way to Qing, but Tres España controls them, so traveling east would only take us to more enemies. Since there is a danger of being found even with stealth cruising, we can’t travel east to your territory or to Edo. Traveling north would mean passing through P.A. Oda, but that wouldn’t be a good idea while they’re fighting the Testament Union. We will travel west and pass through Shikoku which has little Catholic influence.”

“Um... I was asking about you personally.”

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira laughed.

“We can discuss that later. ...I am also interested in what you just said. If we travel west, where is our next destination?”

“W-well, we’ll be going to England. Although I’m afraid of traveling right in front of Shimonoseki after leaving Kyushu.”

“England?” said Mitotsudaira a bit worriedly.

Masazumi nodded and took a breath.

“England controls no Far Eastern land and they use a floating island brought from the Harmonic Divine States. During the Harmonic Unification War, they demanded no territory and acted as an intermediary between the Far East and the other nations. The Izumo Industrial Guild manages the floating island and provides them with various types of technology, but the Musashi was a product of Izumo and Mikawa. To continue on, we need to build a connection with England and repair the Musashi at Izumo. And England is close to M.H.R.R., so even if it’s a bit early, we can look toward Westphalia.”

This had all been decided through her discussions with Neshinbara, Shirojiro, Yoshinao, and some others. The Musashi was almost defenseless in its current state, so they had to reach Izumo and gather some equipment “for defense”.

...I want to avoid as much trouble as I can.

“I really am inexperienced. I realized a lot from all this.”

“I do not think so, but I can tell you are thinking about a lot.”

Mitotsudaira suddenly slowed down. They had not reached the snack shop yet, so Masazumi wondered what had happened.

“Ah.”

She slowed her pace as well.

A number of people where relaxing on mats placed on the road in front of the Blue Thunder. There were several dozen of them and they had all taken part in the conflict earlier in the day.

“What are you doing with all those giant plates? Ah, and alcohol too!”

Everyone turned toward her and placed a finger in front of their noses.

Tenzou crept up as a representative of the group.

“Be quiet. Or at least don’t be too loud. Keep it at a fuzzy level.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. We come here because we can’t contact any of you and we find you relaxing with alcohol?”

The female shop owner walked out with a large plate of food and several mugs filled with cider.

“Who ordered this?”

“Um, all of them may have come of age, but they’re still under twenty.”

Kimi then walked over with flushed cheeks. She tapped Masazumi’s shoulder and placed a finger on her cheek.

“Heh heh heh. What a cute canvas. Next time, it’ll be makeup. Prepare yourself.”

...This girl...

But she felt everyone had their unique position. She did, everyone she knew did, Futayo did while she slept holding a sake bottle split in two, Naruze and Naito did as they slept in an embrace, and all the others had their sometimes unexpected positions.

“Oh, Nenji-kun! Your face is looking red! Are you drunk!?”

“Heh. It’s a shame we couldn’t hold a moon viewing with this sake!”

“Tonight, it will be wine curry!”

She could not speak for some of them, though.

As Kimi moved away, she reached for the plate the female shop owner held.

“Ah,” said the woman. “Aren’t you always complaining about gaining weight when you eat this?”

“Tonight is a celebration and I got a lot of exercise today, mother.”

It took Masazumi just an instant to grasp the familial relationship indicated by Kimi’s final word.

“You’re mother and daughter!?”

The two turned toward her and the mother gave a smile.

“That’s right, Masazumi-san. Thank you for your high opinion of my children.”

The meaning of that comment made her shudder.

Mitotsudaira elbowed her in the side, so she looked over.

“What?”

“You really are inexperienced,” said Mitotsudaira.

“Having it proven yet again really gets me down. ...Anyway, where are Aoi and Horizon?”

She was especially interested in Horizon’s whereabouts. During the festival, Horizon had said she wanted to read some books, but those books had not been history books or other reference books.

...She wanted ones that make people laugh, cry, or grow angry.

Masazumi had brought her some related to jealousy and sorrow.

...But I could only find the kind where the main character shouts ‘what are you doing, you thief!?’ to the girl trying to steal her lover.

Horizon seemed easily influenced, so she hoped it would not cause any problems.

There was a lot about her they did not know, both about the Logismoi Óplo and otherwise.

...Why does she not have the emotion of jealousy despite having the Logismoi Óplo of Phthonos?

It seemed she felt nothing even when Masazumi or the other girls spoke with Toori. Because of that, all the girls had forced Toori to sit in front of them and had given him the following lecture: “Listen. Horizon probably won’t complain, but that means you have to pick up the slack. No more strange behavior or gaining nonsensical courage when it comes to girls.”

“But where is Horizon...?”

“Shh. Masazumi. Quiet.”

The brown algae creatures were looking up at her from a bucket placed next to the snack shop's open door.

"Sorry," she said as she peered inside and spotted the two of them.

They were sitting side by side at a table in the center.

"They're asleep."

"Is it just me or does it look like he was rubbing her thigh?"

Those on the street looked over and shrugged.

Suddenly, she heard a singing voice that was almost just a hum. As Horizon slept, she slowly sang the Song of Passage into the night.

"Let me pass, let me pass

If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?

This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven

Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here

I have come to celebrate this child's tenth birthday

By dedicating these two talismans

Going may be easy, but returning is frightening

Can I pass despite my fear?"

Everyone on the street remained silent as they listened to the song. They all seemed to let it wash over them.

And Masazumi had a sudden thought.

...Is that a song her soul remembered?

It sounded like a lullaby, so she may have heard it from her mother.

Masazumi did not know. And while she still did not know, the song ended and everyone took a breath.

At the same time, she took a breath and took a step back from the entrance.

She stood in the center of the road and looked up into the dim white sky, but then she stretched.

“I guess it all begins tomorrow.”

The next morning, Toori would come here and create a slightly different scene from usual.

From what Masazumi had heard, Toori was having Horizon make him breakfast.

How would that turn out? Horizon’s ideals were placed high and she always claimed it did not come out right, but it was unclear how well her feelings and sense of taste worked together. Masazumi just hoped the flavor would come out all right.

“Oh, but will they eat it together this time?”

Rather than one or the other, they would do it together. What expression would they have if it was not any good?

A lot had changed, but she felt she personally had not changed all that much.

She was inexperienced and she would still have to work as an elementary school lecturer to pay for her tuition.

But after finishing her stretch, she sat down, entered the group of fellow students, reached for a large plate of food, savored the flavor, and spoke.

“I need to make sure I’m on time tomorrow.”



—Huh? Why does this taste so nostalgic?

Huh? Why does this taste so nostalgic?

Afterword

And that's how 1-B ends. But it's also how it all begins. While writing this series, I try not to forget what it was like just starting out, but I also want to do what I can with the more than a decade of experience I have in this line of work.

My goal was to write a first volume that felt like a final volume and I'm thinking of continuing that structure with this series. I hope you can continue on and enjoy it.

Now for the chat.

"Do you have any stories of violence during your school days?"

"It wasn't exactly violent, but during art class in my last year of middle school, I was supposed to draw a CD jacket. It was part of teaching us how to copy something. Anyway, I completely forgot and was the only one who didn't bring a CD that day."

"How is that in any way related to violence? And you were in the art club then, weren't you?"

"I borrowed a random CD sitting around the art supply room and it happened to be Matsuzaki Shigeru. When I started coloring it, the normal mix of colors didn't match his skin color."

"Tanimura Shinji would've been easier."

"Yeah, I had no choice but to make a new color mix, but you know how skin color is known as 'flesh' in English? When I write the labels for storing the colors, I'll put 'man flesh' for a man's skin color."

"That sounds like you're just asking for trouble."

"Anyway, following those rules, I labelled this one 'Matsuzaki Shigeru Flesh'."

"That would be the name."

“I was working with that color, but when I stored it in the art supply room, everyone who went in there had to open it up and see what was inside my ‘Matsuzaki Shigeru Flesh’. By the class the following week, it had dried out and gotten all hard. I had to remake the color about three times because of that.”

“It doesn’t really matter, but do you really think any current students can relate to that?”

We can end that there. Everything feels like it’s started to move in this volume.

“Who will have the hardest time from now on?”

I’ll leave you with that. Oh, and my BGM was JOY by yuki. I think the main two are in a pretty good situation like this.

Next time will be about England as war with Tres España approaches. Wait just a bit longer.

August 2008. An extremely sunny morning that was supposed to have rain.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ 踏み絵(fumi-e) = Allegiance test. Suspected followers of Tsirhc faith were ordered to step on Christian images.
2. ↑ Murayama, Tama
3. ↑ as a function of fumi-e
4. ↑ This school of painting was the dominant style of Japanese painting from the late 15th century to the 19th century.
5. ↑ Aoi means “hollyhock” and the Matsudaira crest is a triple hollyhock.